



Title: Peer on Peer Abuse: Safeguarding Implications  
of Contextualising Abuse between Young  
People within Social Fields

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**PEER ON PEER ABUSE: SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS OF  
CONTEXTUALISING ABUSE BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE  
WITHIN SOCIAL FIELDS**

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Professional Doctorate

University of Bedfordshire

2015

**Peer-on-Peer Abuse: Safeguarding Implications of  
Contextualising Abuse between Young People within Social  
Fields**

by

Carlene Emma Firmin

A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire, in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Professional  
Doctorate Children and Young People's Services Leadership,  
Institute of Applied Social Research

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# PEER ON PEER ABUSE: SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS OF CONTEXTUALISING ABUSE BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN SOCIAL FIELDS

Carlene Emma Firmin

## **ABSTRACT**

An existing body of research indicates that peer-on-peer abuse, involving the physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse of young people by their peers, is an issue of serious concern within the UK. Whilst a range of studies have explored the individual and familial vulnerabilities associated with this phenomenon, there is an increasing recognition of the need to also consider the relationship between young people's peer groups, and other pertinent social fields, to their experiences of such abuse.

This thesis offers an original contribution to the field by explicitly seeking to develop this contextual approach. It applies an age-specific and gendered interpretation of Bourdieu's constructivist structuralism (and specifically the concepts of field, habitus and symbolic violence) to the analysis of nine cases where young people raped or murdered their peers. In doing so, it offers a unique, in-depth, exploration of the interaction between individuals and the social fields that they navigate, in the context of nine abusive incidents. This methodological approach demonstrates how harmful norms underpinning these incidents are informed by a multi-way interplay between various social fields and young people's reflexive engagement with this process. It is through this interplay that motives and power hierarchies are established, and gender, age, consent, culpability, vulnerability and ultimately safety, are socially constructed and experienced.

This thesis also considers the effectiveness of responses to peer-on-peer abuse through the lens of these cases, highlighting the challenges this phenomenon presents to child protection policy and practice. In response it suggests the adoption of an alternative social field perspective that moves from individual-based assessment to a safeguarding framework built upon the assessment of, and intervention with, the contexts associated to abusive incidents.

By offering a socio-cultural account of specific cases, this thesis concludes that the motivators for young people's behaviour and the relationship between peer groups and individual agency, during abusive incidents, require greater attention. Whilst not negating the agency of the individual, the concurrent impact of social fields and norms evidenced through this study highlight the need to ensure individual behaviours and vulnerabilities are more consistently contextualised in relation to the social fields in which they exist.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of

Professional Doctorate Children and Young People's Services Leadership,  
Institute of Applied Social Research at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Name of candidate: Carlene Firmin

Signature:

Date: 04 August 2014

*I wish to dedicate this work to:*

*Anita Pearson, my mum, who inspires all that I do*

*John Firmin, my dad, who is missed every day*

*My mentors and guiding lights in the world of work – Jenny Pearce, Marai Larasi, Dinah Cox, Elizabeth Henry, and Jenny Clifton*

*My goddaughters Tiger and Electra Linney who frequently remind me of the joys of childhood*

*The men who are always by my side Benoit Firmin, Simon Firmin, Henry Firmin and Obinna Nwosu*

*The young women and young men who, over the past decade, have told me about their lives and without whom my work would not have been possible*

*My team at MsUnderstood, who are the changemakers of the future*



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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Extensive national and international research into street gangs, harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), child sexual exploitation (CSE), domestic abuse, and multiple perpetrator rape (MPR), spanning decades, illustrates that a minority of young people experience sexual, emotional and physical abuse in peer groups and intimate relationships<sup>1</sup> (Barter, 2011; Beckett, et al., 2013; Coy, et al., 2011; Firmin, 2013; Franklin, 2004; Hackett, 2014; Pearce, 2013; Pitts, 2008; Powell, 2010). Studies have evidenced the prevalence of such abuse, (Barter, et al., 2009; Horvath and Kelly, 2009; Pearce and Pitts, 2011; Vizard, et al., 2007), the complex and varied individual histories of the young people involved (Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Gadd, et al., 2013; Hackett, et al. 2013), the types of abusive behaviours they exhibit and its impact.

In addition to evidencing the scale of abuse in young people's relationships and peer groups, research indicates that such harm is gendered: largely 'perpetrated' by young men against young women, and to a lesser extent, other young men (Barter, 2011; Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Franklin, 2013; Hackett, 2014). Furthermore, that it occurs between individuals aged 10 upwards, differing in nature to harmful behaviours amongst pre-pubescent children (Barter, et al., 2009; Beckett, 2006; Chung, 2005; Finkelhor, et al., 2009; Hackett, 2011; 2014), as young people develop friendships and relationships independently of the family.

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<sup>1</sup> Intimate relationships in this context cover a range of 'encounters and relationships' identified in the work of Barter, et al. (2009:7). Researchers identified the fluidity of young people's relationships from formal romantic, monogamous relationships, through to more casual relationships some of which overlap with friendships. This broad conceptualisation is also applied throughout this thesis

Increasingly, critical perspectives have embraced the sociological spirit of C Wright Mills (1959) and challenged research on, and responses to, peer-on-peer abuse that consider the phenomenon in the absence of the contexts in which it occurs (Letourneau and Borduin, 2008; Melrose, 2013; Pearce, 2013; Pitts, 2008; Powell, 2010). In 2013, building upon this evidence base, and drawing upon Bourdieu's notions of 'social field', 'habitus' and 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1990), I proposed a conceptualisation of abuse in young people's relationships<sup>2</sup> that began to consider 'peer-on-peer abuse' within social fields (Firmin, 2013a), defined as:

Physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised within young people's relationships (Firmin 2013:50)

Firstly, I argued that while literary evidence implied that young people's peer groups were related to their experiences of peer-on-peer abuse (Barter, et al., 2009; Connolly, et al., 2000; Corr, et al., 2012; Coy, et al., 2013; Franklin, 2004; Henggeler, et al., 2009; Letourneau and Borduin, 2008), a detailed exploration of this relationship was lacking. In its absence the social dynamics of abusive incidents could not be understood, resulting in an insufficient account of young people's sense of power and agency, and ultimately their experiences of consent and culpability.

Secondly, noting the gendered and age specific characteristics of the pre-existing evidence base, I hypothesised that the contexts in which peer-on-peer abuse occurred were themselves age-specific and gendered.

Based on in-depth analysis of cases where young people raped or murdered their peers, this thesis seeks to explore that hypothesis and consider firstly, whether incidents of abuse between young people are:

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<sup>2</sup> Intimate and peer relationships of those aged 10-17 with those of a similar age, excluding familial relationships

influenced by gendered hierarchies within, and external to their relationships (Firmin 2013:50).

In short: is peer-on-peer abuse more than the behaviours and individual characteristics outlined in pre-existing literature? Is the phenomenon, and in particular the abusive dynamics which establish power and consent prior, during and following an abusive incident, informed by the contexts (social field/s) as well as the individuals (social agents) involved? If so – what does this process look like?

This thesis explores these questions by drawing upon evidence from cases where young people raped or murdered their peers. While these are arguably the most extreme expressions of peer-on-peer abuse the escalation towards them involves other behaviours (such as emotional abuse and less serious acts of physical violence), and details environmental influences, that all provide the basis for a socio-cultural account of the phenomenon in question.

The contextual approach adopted also provides a detailed illustration of the dynamics of young people's peer groups. The analysis of peer group data may give the impression that the findings of this study are only relevant to multiple perpetrator cases of peer-on-peer abuse. However, while the majority of cases (seven out of nine) are of this ilk, two involve sole-perpetrators. Peer groups considered in this study actually also includes those of the young person who is abused and wider peer network who are also associated to the cases. This broader exploitation of peer involvement implies that, in addition to other environments, there is value in considering peer groups as a context of influence for complainants, suspects and bystanders, in both sole and multiple perpetrator incidents of peer-on-peer abuse.

Having provided a contextualised account of nine rape and murder cases, this thesis goes on to consider the safeguarding implications of the approach. English safeguarding practice has been criticised for failing to

consistently, and effectively, respond to peer-on-peer abuse (Berelowitz, et al., 2013; Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2013; Jago, et al., 2011). Siloed practices have developed for CSE, domestic abuse, HSB, rape, gangs and serious youth violence, each primarily designed to work with individuals, and familial influences to varying extents (Centre for Social Justice, 2009; Firmin, 2013a; Hackett, 2014; Melrose, 2013). Such responses effectively abstract subjects from their contexts, intervening with young people as problematic and/or risky in and of themselves (Letourneau, et al., 2009; Melrose, 2013; Shuker, 2013). Therefore, I will explore the policy and practice modifications required to effectively address social contexts to which these nine contextualised cases of peer-on-peer abuse were related, considering the implications of such an approach on safeguarding as a result.

## **1.2 Definitions**

The following terms are used throughout this study and as such are defined from the outset.

### ***Peer-on-peer abuse***

In 2013 I identified insufficiencies in policy definitions of CSE, domestic abuse, and serious youth violence that currently apply to the phenomenon of peer-on-peer abuse (Firmin 2013:39-40), arguing that:

these definitions were not designed with peer-on-peer abuse in mind...as a result theorists and professionals seek to capture the phenomenon by applying conceptualisations of

- adult-on-adult abuse (domestic violence);
- adult-on-child abuse (child sexual exploitation); OR

- non-relational and gender-neutral child-on-child violence (serious youth violence)<sup>3</sup>.

This argument resulted in the proposal that peer-on-peer abuse was:

Physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised within young people's relationships.

(Firmin 2013:50)

This definition will be applied throughout this thesis, with 'relationships' defined as extra-familial, friendships and/or intimate relationships, between young people of a similar age. The definition will be explored primarily through incidents of peer-on-peer rape or murder, but also with reference to other acts of physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse between young people during the escalation towards these offences.

### ***Young people***

In order to distinguish it from both abuse between those defined as 'adult' and harmful behaviours displayed by pre-pubescent children, peer-on-peer abuse has been differentially conceptualised in the literature as that which occurs between individuals aged 10 – 17 (Barter, et al., 2009; Berelowitz, et al., 2012). While this boundary is somewhat artificial, it will be applied throughout the methodology, findings, and discussion of my study. Given the socially constructed boundaries of childhood, dependency and responsibility within English social policy (Coleman, 1992; Jenks, 2005), these parameters have been adopted for two reasons:

- 1) 10 is the minimum age of criminal responsibility in England.

Therefore, young people who abuse their peers from the age of ten

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<sup>3</sup> Although all definitions allow for peer-on-peer abuse to varying extents, they have not been interpreted in this way. For example, the definition of child sexual exploitation allows for the perpetrator to be of any age but responses under the definition have primarily applied to adult-on-child abuse. Likewise the definition of serious youth violence applies to young men and young women but has traditionally been interpreted and applied to violence and abuse between young men only

are criminally responsible and culpable. As this study is based on data from criminal justice files a lower age of 10 is the cut-off point

- 2) In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), English legislation defines that a person is a child until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Agencies have a statutory duty to protect individuals up until this age. As the implications for safeguarding are under consideration in this study, an upper age limit of 17 will ensure that recommendations fall within the remit of statutory child protection responsibilities.

During the course of this thesis I will use the term 'young people', 'young men', 'young women' and 'young person' apart from occasions where I am quoting others who may use 'teenager', 'adolescent' and 'child' to refer to the age group in question. When referenced studies consider sub-sets of young people within and beyond this age parameter I will highlight so in the text, but such fluidity will not apply to my findings.

### ***Abuse***

The term 'abuse' rather than 'violence' is employed in my study for two reasons. Firstly, abuse is defined as a behaviour which causes harm, including physical, emotional and sexual harm. Secondly, abuse can also be defined as 'misuse' i.e. to abuse alcohol. In this thesis both aspects of the definition are applied – abuse is something that causes harm, and is predicated on a 'misuse' of power. Such a definition emphasises the relational and contextual characteristics of the phenomenon in question beyond the harmful actions that may be involved. It is also important to note here that the term 'abuse' locates the phenomenon in question at the 'abusive' and 'violent' end of Hackett's continuum of sexual behaviour (2011), distinguishing it from behaviours which are inappropriate or problematic but not necessarily predicated on an abuse of power in the absence of consent (this continuum is explored further in chapter two).

## ***Consent***

Throughout my study I employ a social, rather than medical, definition of consent (Pearce, 2013), applied to section 74 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003: 'a person consents if he agrees by choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice' (Home Office, 2000). A social model of consent means that freedom and capacity to choose can be affected by environmental and social factors, and does not necessarily refer to medical capacity to consent (Coy, et al., 2013; Pearce, 2013). While primarily taken from notions of consent 'to sexual activity', this definition of consent will be applied to all behaviours under consideration in this thesis, including consent to engage in physically and emotionally abusive behaviours.

## ***Social field***

When exploring social contexts the notion of 'social field' is used in this thesis. Taken from Bourdieu (1990), the concept defines the values and conventions that set the 'rules' within contexts in which social interactions occur. My study considers the rules within contexts in which peer-on-peer abuse occurs and in doing so draws upon 'social field' theory throughout (further examined in chapter three).

## ***Hegemonic masculinities***

Gender is explored in this thesis through the notion of 'hegemonic masculinities' – a concept originally conceived of by Connell (1987; 1995), further developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), and applied by scholars including Light (2007) and Morrell et al (2014) to explore young people's lives and experiences. 'Hegemonic masculinities' makes reference to, and has been used to explore 'behaviours, processes and structures that legitimate hierarchical relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men' (Messerschmidt, 2012a:58). The definition has been developed (i.e. Budgeon, 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) to recognise:



- the construction and reproduction of such masculinities locally, regionally and globally and the agency of subordinated groups and individuals
- that 'masculinity' is relational concept and is not defined by lists of character traits, such as 'strength', in the absence of their relation to either other gender identities or gendered hierarchical structures.

### **1.3 The study**

Overall, my study aims to conceptualise incidents of peer-on-peer abuse in relation to the social contexts in which they occur and identify the implications of this approach for safeguarding responses in England. This aim is achieved by:

- a) Examining the usefulness of a definition that peer-on-peer abuse is 'physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised within young people's relationships'; in terms of its ability to enable the identification of, and response to, peer-on-peer abuse.
- b) Assessing the hypothesis that as it is influenced by gendered hierarchies within and external to young people's relationships, peer-on-peer abuse is not simply reducible to the vulnerabilities of a particular victim or the proclivities of a particular perpetrator but a function/product/outcome of a specific sequence of events occurring and arising within particular socio-cultural settings.
- c) Considering the implications of adopting a socio-cultural conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse for safeguarding policy and practice.
- d) Exploring the possibility of developing a safeguarding framework that responds to the relationships between social contexts and individuals when addressing peer-on-peer abuse.

Which in turn are realised through:

- the identification of the social contexts in which nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse occurs
- an exploration of the nature of these social contexts
- consideration of the impact of these social contexts on peer-on-peer abuse
- a reflection on whether/how an understanding of the relationship between social contexts and individuals can improve the identification of, and responses to, peer-on-peer abuse.

In order to meet its objectives, my study uses an age and gender-specific interpretation of Bourdieusian social theory to explore the relationship between structure and agency in nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse that have been investigated by the police. This theoretical approach recognises the interplay between individual agency and structures; acknowledging a reflexive relationship between social rules and individual action. Analysis will seek to identify the social rules at play, the extent to which they are age-specific and/or gendered, and their interplay with individual actors, in the social fields in which peer-on-peer abuse occurs. This approach is not intended to produce large-scale findings about something that happens in every case of peer-on-peer abuse. Rather, it offers a detailed account of the social dynamics involved in a select number of rape and murder cases to develop a theoretical framework through which pre-existing evidence, safeguarding practice, and future research can be considered.

#### **1.4 Thesis structure**

To present the findings of my study, this thesis adopts the following structure.

The evidence base underpinning my study is presented across three literature chapters (2-4). The first chapter critically explores what is known about the nature and prevalence of peer-on-peer abuse drawing together disparate areas of research into child sexual exploitation, teenage relationship abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, serious youth and gang-related violence and multiple perpetrator rape. In doing so, it identifies thematic characteristics of peer-on-peer abuse and the knowledge gaps to be addressed by my study.

The second literature chapter outlines a theoretical framework through which to address the knowledge gaps identified in chapter two. Firstly, Bourdieu's 'constructivist structuralism' (1990; 2001) and his concepts of 'social field', 'habitus' and 'symbolic violence' are presented and critiqued; exploring the interplay between structure and agency, the capacity for social change, and the objects of human action. Secondly, and with reference to Bourdieu's approach, Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) revised relational concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' is considered against the gendered characteristics of peer-on-peer abuse presented in the current evidence base. Finally, sociological theories of childhood, particularly those developed by Jenks (2005) are appraised, with reference to both constructivist structuralism and hegemonic masculinity, to present the theory of childhood used in this study. In examining perspectives on structure/agency, gender, and age, these three theoretical branches provide the critical lens through which pre-existing evidence on peer-on-peer abuse, and safeguarding responses to the issue, can be viewed.

The third literature chapter outlines safeguarding responses to peer-on-peer abuse, assessing them with reference to the evidenced nature of the phenomenon and the theoretical perspective of my study. In doing so, it identifies limitations of current safeguarding practice with reference to its engagement with: contexts; young people; and the concept of gender. As a result, this chapter critically examines shortcomings of safeguarding

practice and hypothesises the implications of a contextualised conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse.

The literature chapters, taken together, identify insufficiencies in the conceptualisation of, and response to, peer-on-peer abuse to date. They make a case for exploring peer-on-peer abuse within the contexts that it occurs, and point to the most appropriate methodological approach for attending to that gap. In-depth case file analysis suits an exploration of the relationship between social contexts and individual agency. It is only through such an approach that the rules of various social contexts, and the way in which individuals relate to those contexts and the abusive incidents that occur, can be excavated. This position is developed through a methodology chapter which follows.

The methodology chapter outlines both the reasons for adopting a case file analysis approach and the way in which this was employed in my study. The methodology chapter indicates how the definition of peer-on-peer abuse that I proposed in 2013 (Firmin 2013a), and the gendered and age-specific constructivist structuralism developed in the literature chapters, informed the design of case file templates, the inclusion criteria for the study and the analysis of the data. Ethical considerations, limitations, and challenges, of the study are also reported. These reflections set the parameters for the conclusions that can be drawn from my findings, and demonstrate how these meet the original aim and objectives of my study.

The findings of my study are presented across 10 chapters that follow with the primary objective of exploring the relationships between context and individual behaviour, and the professional response to these, in nine cases of rape or murder. The extensive nature of the data on each context (social field) featured in the nine cases required these findings to be split into multiple chapters: first considering the nature of the abuse, then conceptualising it with context-by-context, before examining the safeguarding responses in the files. The first findings chapter (six) offers

an overview of the cases included in the study; followed by chapter seven which presents the nature of abusive incidents under analysis. The findings on the individual young people (the social agents) involved in the case files are presented in chapter eight. Having presented the nature of the abusive incidents and the characteristics of the young people involved, chapters 9-12 present the nature of the social fields in which both the abusive incidents took place and the individual young people acted. Chapter 13 draws together the findings from chapters 9-12 to offer a socio-cultural account of the nine cases under consideration.

Chapter 14 documents the safeguarding responses to the recorded in the nine files, before chapter 15 critically discusses these findings with reference to the social field analysis presented in chapter 13. This process identifies the limitations of safeguarding responses that fail to strategically, and consistently, locate peer-on-peer abuse within the contexts that it occurs, and points to the safeguarding implications of such an approach.

Chapter 16 brings the contextual account of abuse, and the recorded safeguarding responses, in nine cases to identify five thematic points of discussion. These identified themes point towards the safeguarding implications of this study, which are outlined in detail in chapter 17. This concluding chapter proposes a contextualised theoretical framework for responding to peer-on-peer abuse and identifies the modifications required in policy, practice and research to pilot and develop such an approach.

## **2. Literature Review: the evidence on peer-on-peer abuse**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Evidence on peer-on-peer abuse is distributed across a range of research areas. Literature on teenage relationships / intimate partner violence, harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), multiple perpetrator rape (MPR), child sexual exploitation (CSE), and serious youth and gang-related violence, all offer perspectives on the nature of the phenomenon and the responses required.

The definitions upon which these research areas are built both intersect with, and yet do not fully accommodate, instances of peer-on-peer abuse as defined for this study (see Appendix B for full definitions). In brief: teenage relationship abuse refers to ‘emotional, verbal, physical and sexual forms of violence...both in isolation and as they coexist in young people’s relationships’<sup>4</sup> (Barter, et al., 2009:12); HSB research is concerned with the study of ‘children and young people presenting with sexual behaviours that are outside of developmentally ‘normative’ parameters’ (Hackett, 2014:15); MPR is termed as ‘any sexual assault involving two or more perpetrators’ (Horvath and Kelly, 2009:94); CSE is defined as involving ‘exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ in exchange for sexual activity’ (DSCF, 2009:9); serious youth violence is ‘any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime, where the victim is aged 1-19’ (London Safeguarding Children Board, 2009:6.); finally, a gang is defined as:

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<sup>4</sup> While adopting a fluid definition of relationships, researchers still restrict these instances to that which happens between ‘partners’ i.e. 1:1 and which therefore does not include peer groups

A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with, or lay claim over, territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and (5) are in conflict with other similar gangs.

(Centre for Social Justice, 2009; Pitts, 2008).

This chapter brings together these disparate research areas, under the definition employed for my study, and critically examines what they illustrate about the nature of peer-on-peer abuse with reference to:

- the abusive behaviours involved
- the young people affected, with specific consideration of age and gender
- the interplay between peer group dynamics and agency
- representations of consent and culpability
- individualistic and contextualised conceptualisations of the phenomenon.

This assessment of pre-existing evidence will surface questions about peer-on-peer abuse that the remainder of this thesis will seek to address.

## **2.2 The nature of peer on peer abuse**

Research identifies that peer-on-peer abuse is a ‘commonplace,’ rather than isolated, problem across England (Barter, et al. 2009; Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Fox, et al., 2012), occurring both online and offline (Berelowitz, et al., 2013; CEOP, 2013; Ringrose, et al., 2011), and is of global concern (Beckett, 2013; Brodie, 2013; Chung, 2005; Finkelhor, et al., 2009). The phenomenon involves sexual and emotional abuse (Beckett, et al., 2013; Pearce, 2009), in addition to physical abuse, between young people (Barter, et al., 2009; Connolly, et al, 2000).

An English survey of 1,065 13-14 year olds found that 52.5 per cent had at least one experience of victimisation, perpetration or witnessing relationship abuse (Fox, et al., 2012). Approximately a quarter of child sexual exploitation cases are peer-on-peer (Barnardo's, 2011a; Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Firmin, 2013c) while in London it's the most readily identified form of sexual exploitation (Beckett, et al., 2014).

A separate survey of 1,185 13-17 year olds in England identified that, in their relationships, three-quarters of girls had experienced emotional abuse, a third had experienced sexual violence and one quarter reported physical violence (Barter, et al., 2009:178). While half of boys also reported emotional abuse and 18 per cent physical violence, only six per cent and one in ten respectively considered this to have had a negative impact on their lives. This is compared to three quarters of girls who had been physically or sexually abused, and a third who had been emotionally abused, who said this had been detrimental to them in some way.

For some young people an act of physical/sexual violence occurs only once, whereas for others a pattern of abuse emerges, and sometimes the violence escalates (Barter, et al., 2009). Such abuse can range from the use of coercive and controlling behaviours such as name calling, online stalking, or threats to end the relationship, through to the use of physical violence including punching, kicking, attempted strangulation and rape (Barter, et al., 2009; Barter, 2011; Firmin, 2011; Gadd, et al., 2013).

Although rare, in the UK young people under the age of 18 have been killed by partners or ex-partners (BBC News, 2009a; BBC News, 2009b; The Guardian, 2012). Research has recently surfaced evidence of peer-on-peer abuse experienced by gang-associated young women, including sexual exploitation, coerced offending and partner violence (Beckett, et al., 2013; Firmin, 2011; Khan, et al., 2013).

Studies into MPR and group-associated CSE cite physical violence, humiliation and sadism in cases of peer-on-peer abuse (Berelowitz, et al.,



2012; Woodhams, 2013). As Franklin (2013) explains in her assessment of MPR cases across Western countries:

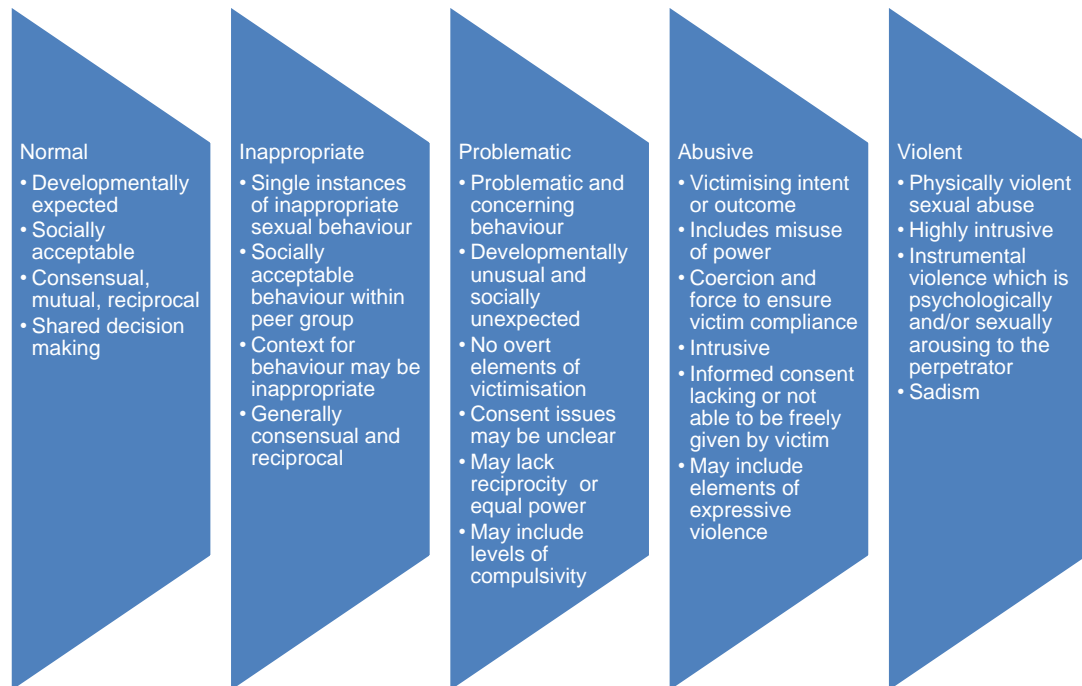
The majority [of cases] involved groups of adolescent and young adult males assaulting teenage girls or young women within a recreational context...gratuitous degradation often accompanies the sexual assault. Assailants' moods are typically described as celebratory, with participants laughing and cheering one another on.

(Franklin, 2013:38)

Woodhams built on this by exploring aggression in MPR. In some cases violence occurred as a result of victim resistance, whereas in others it was the result of group dynamic (Woodhams, 2013:190).

Hackett (2011:122) has developed a continuum of sexual behaviour to contextualise the sexually abusive conduct outlined thus far. The continuum conceptualises behaviours with reference to contexts, developmental constructs of age, the impact of sexual behaviours on others and notions of power and control. For this study it offers a holistic lens through which peer-on-peer can be considered (Figure 1).

Both the current evidence base on peer-on-peer abuse and the focus of my study are primarily concerned with incidents at the abusive and violent end of Hackett's continuum. Yet behaviours that are problematic or inappropriate may also feature on young people's pathways to abusive incidents as defined. Hackett's continuum serves as a helpful reminder that responses to peer-on-peer abuse, and the behaviours that may precede it, need to be as broad as possible to accommodate its nature. Taken together, the following sections of this chapter assess the extent to which research into peer-on-peer abuse locates the behaviours outlined thus far within the contextual and relational considerations of Hackett's continuum.



**Figure 1 Hackett's continuum of children and young people's sexual behaviours**

### **2.3 The young people affected**

While research indicates that those affected by peer-on-peer abuse have assorted life narratives (Barter, et al., 2009; Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Hackett, et al., 2013; Franklin, 2013) it also implies that some young people are more vulnerable to the phenomenon than others.

Some of these patterns concern the individual characteristics of young people (Barter, 2011; Hackett, 2014; Kelly, 2013), most frequently their age and gender. Peer-on-peer abuse is routinely evidenced as affecting young people aged 10 and upwards (Barter, et al., 2009; Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Catch 22, 2013; Pitts, 2008). The vast majority of individuals who abuse their peers are identified as young men (Barter, et al., 2009; Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Hackett, 2014; Kelly, 2013; Pitts, 2008; 2013). With the exception of gang-related physical abuse, young women are more consistently identified as those who are abused, although research is increasingly identifying the abuse of young men (Barter, et al., 2009;

Beckett, et al., 2013; Melrose, 2013). Age and gender will be explored in greater detail in sub-sections 2.4 and 2.5.

Beyond age and gender, CSE literature indicates that sexual exploitation affects black and minority ethnic (BME) young people, who are under-identified compared with their white peers (Gohir, 2013; Larasi, 2013; Sharp, 2013). Conversely, a high proportion of BME young people are associated to gang-related violence (Home Office, 2008), a pattern that is said to result from the presence of black people in neighbourhoods that are impoverished, suffer high levels of social exclusion and are affected by gang related violence (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2008; Palmer and Pitts, 2006; Pitts, 2008).

In addition to individual characteristics, research associates young people's familial characteristics with vulnerability to peer-on-peer abuse (Beckett, 2011; Coy, 2009; Vizard, et al., 2007). It highlights that young people living in residential care are disproportionately affected by CSE<sup>5</sup> (Beckett, 2011; Coy, 2009; OCC, 2012). The same cohort of young people are said to be disproportionality affected by teenage relationship abuse (Wood, Barter, and Berridge, 2011). Exposure to domestic abuse in the home has been associated with young people both abusing their peers and being vulnerable to abuse themselves (Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Gadd, et al., 2013); as have experiences of intra-familial child abuse (Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Gadd, et al., 2013; Vizard, et al., 2007).

Other researchers reference environmental settings, such as particular neighbourhoods, when identifying large populations of young people who are vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse (Beckett, et al., 2013; Home Affairs Select Committee, 2008; Pitts, 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> although it does not distinguish between peer-on-peer abuse and that which is perpetrated by adults

Invariably evidence suggests an overlay between all of these factors when identifying young people who are vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse. Understanding the interplay between the characteristics outlined is a persistent challenge. The literature fails to consistently conceptualise vulnerabilities in relation to one other, and to broader social contexts (Connolly, et al., 2000; Letourneau and Borduin 2008). For example, Gadd, et al., (2013:29) found that young men who had perpetrated abuse in their intimate relationships had experienced abuse within the home, and had a number of other individual vulnerabilities such as drug or alcohol misuse and/or learning difficulties, but did not explore the relation of these to one another or social contexts. Likewise, while some studies identify a relationship between ethnicity, living in gang-affected neighbourhoods, and gender, to gang-association (Palmer and Pitts, 2006), others simply list these as independent factors associated with gang violence (Centre for Social Justice, 2009). With echoes of research into the vulnerabilities associated with victims of CSE (Berelowitz, et al., 2012), studies frequently focus on individual experiences and familial risk as drivers of peer-on-peer abuse, as opposed to the relationships between those vulnerabilities and the structural contexts in which they exist.

Associations between vulnerabilities, in an ad hoc, rather than consistent fashion, has resulted in the production of vulnerability lists and assessments tools, that outline individual, family and environmental characteristics as independently, rather than co-dependently, associated with peer-on-peer abuse (Berelowitz, et al., 2012; DSCF, 2009). Yet the evidence suggests that while some young people who live in gang-affected neighbourhoods, or have witnessed abuse in the home, or are aged 12, have experienced peer-on-peer abuse, this does not apply to all of their counterparts. Why are there characteristics associated with peer-on-peer abuse for some and not for all who experience/display them? Questions remain regarding how these factors interplay to create a

vulnerability to experiencing or engaging in peer-on-peer abuse – questions this thesis will consider.

## **2.4 Consideration of ‘gender’**

As outlined in sub-section 2.2, peer-on-peer abuse is largely described as a heteronormative phenomenon perpetrated by young men, against predominantly young women and sometimes other young men (Barter, 2011; Berelowitz, et al., 2013; Firmin, 2011; Woodhams and Horvath, 2013; Messerschmidt 2012b)<sup>6</sup>. While broader research into young people’s relationships has found that they form within heterosexual, hegemonic structural contexts (i.e. Holland et al., 1998), the significance of these patterns in peer-on-peer abuse literature has been interpreted differentially by scholars resulting in more than one conceptualisation of the gendered nature of peer-on-peer abuse.

Some research highlights the under-recognition of the victimisation of young men (Barnardo’s, 2013; DfE, 2011; Melrose, 2013). This gap in knowledge has led to critiques of explicitly gendered approaches to CSE that exclude the experiences of boys and young men (Melrose, 2013). Other studies have argued that the application of gender stereotypes have resulted in the labelling of young men as perpetrators of exploitation rather than as those who had been groomed to be abusive (Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Firmin, 2013a). An increasing recognition of gang-associated young women (Batchelor, 2005; Beckett, et al., 2013; Campbell, 1984; Firmin, 2011; Khan, et al., 2013; Miller, 2001), has contributed to the recognition that gang-associated young men and young women can be

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<sup>6</sup> Associated with this is the fact that most research focuses on relationships between young people defined as ‘heterosexual’. Barter, et al., 2009 study involved 50 young people who had a same sex partner. Within this sample, this cohort of young people was more likely to experience physical, sexual, and emotional harm in their relationships. However, the research team also found that this same group of young people were more likely to have experienced family and peer violence, to be older, and to have an older partner – all factors they found to be associated with experiences of ‘partner abuse and exploitation’. As a result the researchers were cautious about drawing conclusions from these findings, particularly in light of the fact that the broader evidence base is heavily weighted towards heterosexual relationships.

simultaneously abused and abusive (Beckett, et al., 2013; Firmin, 2013a; Pitts, 2008; 2013).

Researchers also dispute the extent to which gender is relevant to young people's experiences of relationship abuse. Research implies that girls and boys use physical and emotional violence against partners at comparable rates (Barter, et al., 2009; Fox, et al., 2013). Despite this, young men are more likely to perpetrate sexual violence against a partner (Fox, et al., 2013) and violence perpetrated by young men is more likely to have a negative/controlling impact on a partner (Barter, et al., 2009). By focusing on prevalence Fox, et al., (2013:9) conclude that 'domestic abuse becomes a gendered phenomenon among adult cohorts'. Whereas Barter, et al., (2009:179) and Connolly et al., (2000), being concerned with the differential negative impact of relationship abuse on young men and young women, conclude that the phenomenon is 'indisputably differentiated by gender'.

Literature implies that gender inequality is a driver for peer-on-peer abuse, finding that:

- boys are more likely to consider it acceptable to hit a partner than girls (Fox, et al., 2013)
- street gangs are invariably referred to as 'hyper-masculine' environments that host abusive behaviours (Firmin, 2011; Hallsworth and Young, 2011; Pitts, 2013)
- MPR serves a performative function through which young men can validate their masculinity (Franklin, 2004; Kelly, 2013; Lambine 2013).

Yet the implications of this are not consistently investigated throughout the evidence-base (Chung, 2005). For example, young men report that being unable to trust a partner, or seeking to protect their partner from other men by controlling them, are factors driving their abusive behaviours (Corr, et

al., 2013; Gadd, et al., 2013). Yet, while this *implies* a pursuit of hegemonic masculinity amongst some young men (Messerschmidt, 2012b), little was done in the aforementioned studies to *evidence* the interplay between young people's attitudes towards gender inequality, hegemonically masculine contexts, and the perpetration of abuse within young people's relationships.

Arguably, were scholars across research areas to consistently recognise gender as socially constructed, and interrogate data in this way, the relevance of these patterns may be interpreted. From research into street gangs, through to MPR, there is evidence that broader societal constructs such as normative gender roles and social isolation, are associated with peer-on-peer abuse. As Franklin notes, media coverage of group based sexual offending tends to ignore the broader social contexts in which this abuse takes place:

By separating the crime from its social context, media portrayals avoid addressing the complicity of Western cultural ideas that pressure young men to behave in violent and harmful ways.

(Franklin, 2013:61).

Similarly, whilst literature evidences that the vast majority of those who abuse their peers are young men, it doesn't consistently explore why this is the case. As a result any study of peer-on-peer abuse needs to consider the construction of gender in relation to the phenomenon and not just record the gender 'identity' of the young people involved (Chung, 2005).

## **2.5 Consideration of 'age'**

In addition to gender, as outlined in sub-section 2.4, the age of those involved is a characteristic consistently associated with peer-on-peer abuse. Peer-on-peer sexual exploitation is evidenced as occurring from

the age of 10<sup>7</sup> (Barnardo's, 2011a; Berelowitz, et al., 2012; CEOP 2011), whereas teenage relationship abuse research indicates onset from the age of 12 (Barter, 2011; Family Lives, 2012; Gadd, et al., 2013). Young people are considered to be affected by gangs and serious youth violence from 10 - 12<sup>8</sup> years old (Catch 22, 2013; Off Centre, 2013; Home Affairs Select Committee, 2008; Pitts, 2008). Likewise, the majority of those young people who display HSB are aged 12 upwards (Finkelhor, et al., 2009) even though they may be aged 13-15 at the point of identification/referral (Hackett, 2014). Taken in total, peer-on-peer abuse is evidenced as being experienced by young people aged 10 upwards and largely 'perpetrated' by those aged 12 upwards.

Despite the relatively young ages of those affected by peer-on-peer abuse, scholars who have gradually evidenced the phenomenon were working against a backdrop of research that had originally conceptualised abusers as 'adult'. While the policy definition of CSE allows for exploitation to be perpetrated by someone of any age (DCSF, 2009), CSE literature has traditionally focused on adult-to-child modes of exploitation, originally the 'older-boyfriend' model (Barnardo's, 2009; 2011) and more recently organised sexual exploitation networks (Brayley, Cokbain, and Laycock, 2011) and abuse linked to businesses and transport hubs (Berelowitz, et al., 2013). This focus is largely based upon the implied belief that young people are exploited through an abuse of power linked to age. As increasing consideration has been given to the sexual exploitation of young people by their peers, professionals have struggled to adapt models initially designed to address adult-on-child exploitation (Beckett, et al., 2013; Beckett and Firmin, 2014; Berelowitz, et al., 2013; Coy, et al., 2011; Firmin 2013a). A decade ago similar concerns were raised by Longo (2003), who claimed HSB interventions in the US 'erroneously view(ed) these children as mini-adults, mini-perpetrators, sexual predators and the

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<sup>7</sup> Although some services are now identifying young people aged 8 upwards, and Barnardo's (2012) reported that as a result of access to technology sexual exploitation was affecting younger children

<sup>8</sup> and some have argued even younger



like' (2003:503). The notions of consent, central to the definition of exploitation (Pearce, 2013), and culpability are particularly vexed in cases where all of those involved are under the legal age of consent to sex but above the age of criminal responsibility (Firmin, 2013c) - conceptual tensions that will be explored in sub-section 2.7.

Limitations aside, MPR and HSB scholars have highlighted the significance of the age of both those who are abused and those who are abusive in cases of peer-on-peer abuse. Increasingly concerted effort has been made to ensure that HSB interventions are age appropriate and do not fall foul of a social construction of age that equates abusive behaviours with adulthood (Hackett, 2004; Erooga and Masson, 2006; Morrison and Henniker, 2006).

In addition, HSB researchers have sought to identify sub-groups of young people who sexually harm, including those who harm their peers as opposed to those who harm much younger children (Beckett, 2006; Finkelhor, et al., 2009; Hackett, 2011; 2014; Parks and Bard, 2006). These studies indicate higher levels of criminality amongst young people who abuse their peers whereas those who harm younger children are more socially isolated (Beckett, 2006; Hackett, 2014; Letourneau and Borduin, 2008). Broadly speaking HSB literature demonstrates that young people who sexually harm have extensive histories of victimisation and vulnerable familial characteristics (Vizard, et al., 2007). Yet, in keeping with other studies, Hackett (2014) draws upon a study by Beckett and Gerhold which found that young people in the UK who abused their peers had lower levels of previous victimisation and were more likely to be involved in other forms of criminal and anti-social behaviour than those who abused younger children.

Beckett and Gerhold's 2003 research (in Hackett, 2014) also indicates qualitative differences in the nature of the sexual harm caused by those who abuse their peers and those that harm younger children. The former are more likely to sexually harm an acquaintance or stranger, as opposed

to a family member, and to harm in public, or according to Finkelhor, et al., (2009) in school, instead of their home. Some MPR research has also indicated that multiple perpetrator rapes are more likely to occur outdoors than indoors (Lambine, 2013; Porter and Alison, 2006). Given that young people are at a socially constructed period of time where they socialise in public spaces (Connolly, et al., 2000; Skelton and Valentine, 1998), and are unlikely to be living with their partners, it is probable that much of their relationships, and abusive behaviours that occur within them, will develop in locations such as parks and schools.

Findings about age-related qualitative difference in the nature of peer-on-peer abuse have also been echoed by teenage relationship abuse researchers. US research into 'dating violence' (Jackson, et al., 2000; Hickman, et al., 2004), has been critiqued by Barter, et al., (2009) for being based on social constructions and models of 'adult relationships'. Such conceptualisations fail to capture the dynamic, fluid, and arguably networked typologies of young people's relationships and peer groups (Chung, 2005; Connolly, et al., 2000; Firmin 2013c).

A relationship between networked/group offending and the age of those involved has also been explored by MPR researchers who found that MPR is more frequently committed by young people in their teens and early twenties: as offender age increases the number of offenders involved in assaults decreases (Lambine, 2013). In addition, young people who commit sexual offences in groups rarely commit the same offences on their own (De Wree, 2004; Franklin, 2004; Warr 2002)<sup>9</sup>.

While research into teenage relationship abuse and HSB literature, and broader studies into young people's intimate relationships, points towards the importance of peer groups in setting the scene for intimate relationship dynamics (Barter, et al., 2009; Connolly, 2000; Chung, 2005; Henggeler, et al., 2009; Holland, et al., 1998), the interplay between peer groups and

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<sup>9</sup> To an extent this distinguishes cases of multiple perpetrator rape from young people who display harmful sexual behaviour on their own (Hackett 2011).

relationships at the point of an abusive incident has not been fully explored. The emphasis on peer group dynamics within the MPR literature implies that the relationship between young people's peer groups and their behaviours warrants further exploration when conceptualising peer-on-peer abuse.

## **2.6 Peer group dynamics**

The significance of peer groups for young people has been documented within a broad range of literature (Frosh, et al., 2002; Gardner and Steinberg, 2005; Morash, 1986; Messerschmidt, 2012b). Given the social structures which set out the parameters of space in which young people 'develop', young people want to belong to peer groups (Corsaro and Eder, 1990), regardless of whether this group is pro or anti social. Young people establish status within friendship groups, experiencing and demonstrating loyalty to peers, as a means of developing or reinforcing their own identity (Catch 22, 2013; Giordano, Cernkovich and Holland, 2003).

Studies into young people's relationships have identified young men's peer groups as hegemonically masculine contexts (Holland, et al., 1998), and research demonstrates that, being part of a violent peer group increases the risk of boys' instigation of violence in their intimate relationships (Barter, et al., 2009; Chung, 2005; Connolly, et al., 2000). Other studies have indicated that the peer group itself can create a conducive context for abuse by encouraging power and control:

For some young men...control could be a collective endeavour, facilitated via social media, to insult; those men deemed unable to keep their girlfriends on lockdown.

(Corr, et al. 2013:8-9).

The influence of peer and other environmental dynamics is evidenced across literature into serious youth and gang-related violence in the UK (Catch 22, 2013; Centre for Social Justice, 2009; Off Centre, 2013; Pitts,

2008; Ralphs, Medina and Aldridge, 2009; Spindler and Bouchard, 2011).  
A study into the role of families in facilitating gang membership stated that:

Most of the young people and family members interviewed saw factors outside the family as having a greater influence on their gang association. Issues widely seen as more significant included growing up in a 'hostile' environment where gang membership, criminality and violence was normalised; negative experiences of school; the pull of peer subculture...and the search for identity, independence and respect.

(Catch 22, 2013:4)

These dynamics are reflected and expanded upon by Warr in his study on groups. Warr (2002) identifies specific factors/characteristics that hold and bond together 'youth' groups, including:

- fear of exclusion from the group
- desire to be accepted by, and to gain status within, the group
- need for group loyalty and to abide by the moral codes set by the group.

It is for these reasons that the social and moral code of young people's peer groups is said to often outweigh those set by wider societal norms within which they may be located (Cialdini and Trost, 1998; Franklin, 2013). Leaders within groups may be influenced by particular societal norms that are then adopted by the group as a whole, be these pro or anti-social (Chung, 2005; Franklin, 2013). Individuals in the group need to demonstrate their ability to adhere to that norm, and MPR research has evidenced that the 'presence of others can heighten the need for others to show off' (Franklin, 2013; Lambine, 2013).

Literature implies that peer groups may be influential for netting young people into peer-on-peer exploitation (Beckett, et al., 2013; Berelowitz, et al., 2013; Firmin, 2011), and facilitate or sustain abusive behaviours

(Barter, et al., 2009; Chung, 2005; Henggeler, et al., 2009). Like Connolly, et al., (2000), Barter, et al. (2009:188) identified that for boys 'peer violence was found to be the strongest predictor of [them] both experiencing and instigating partner violence'. The same research team evidenced young people's experiences of sexual harassment within peer networks through the following account:

There is some boys in the school that like keep asking me to have sex with them and I am just like "no", like on a daily basis...like they will walk around school and try dragging me into corners and feel me up and everything and it's just irritating because they don't understand.

(Barter, et al. 2009:110)

Beyond the examples from Holland, et al., (1998), Connolly, et al., (2000), Chung (2005), and Barter, et al., (2009), there is little within teenage relationship abuse literature that assesses the nature of the interplay between hegemonically masculine peer groups and instances of peer-on-peer abuse<sup>10</sup>. Likewise, despite indications that addressing young people's association with 'deviant peers' is central to systemic responses to HSB (Henggeler et, al., 2009; Letourneau and Borduin, 2008), literature in this field is yet to fully explore potential differences between young people who harm their peers within groups as opposed to those who harm alone; presently drawing upon research into sexual exploitation and street gangs instead (Beckett, et al., 2013; Berelowitz, et al., 2013; Hackett, 2014). Given that literature implies that younger people are more likely to sexually offend in groups than alone (Finkelhor, et al., 2009; Gardner and Steinberg, 2005; Porter and Alison 2006; Warr 2002), this is an omission that warrants attention.

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<sup>10</sup> Given that this is a relatively young research area in the UK, studies have tended to focus on establishing prevalence, have surveyed large numbers of young people, or identified the life histories of individuals who have been affected.

MPR literature is explicitly built on the premise that the dynamics of sole, duo, and group sexual offending are different and as such cases and analysis require differentiation (Lambine, 2013). As numbers of offenders increase so does the level of violence (Hauffe and Porter, 2009; Woodhams, 2004; 2013). Researchers argue that much of what occurs within MPR cases is about the group dynamic and not necessarily about the person who is being abused (Franklin, 2013). Studies repeatedly indicate that the victim is a 'dramatic prop' (Franklin, 2013:59) for the social activity of the group (Lambine, 2013) and is objectified for the means of group social bonding (Bijleveld and Hendriks, 2003). It is this social nature of the victimisation that is sometimes used to explain the levels of violence and humiliation experienced by the person being abused, with those involved trying to 'outdo' one another (Franklin, 2004; Woodhams, 2013). In terms of motivating factors and the nature of MPR the evidence indicates that in a sense 'the reward is social rather than sexual' (Lambine, 2013:70).

This MPR exploration of group dynamics adds to a relatively sparse evidence-base within literature on peer-on-peer abuse, which either locates abuse in 1:1 relationships (sometimes associated to peer groups) or fails to specify where group activity is a feature.

In unpicking group dynamics, MPR theorists have also identified group-roles such as leaders and followers (Bijleveld, et al., 2007; Porter, 2013; Porter and Alison 2001). The identification of group roles adds to notions of 'peer group performance' and 'group-bonding' during sexual assaults, espoused by authors such as Franklin (2004). With followers seeking to demonstrate group loyalty and impress leaders, and leaders achieving or sustaining power within the group as a result of the assault (Bijleveld and Hendriks, 2003).

Leadership is identified through the behaviours (Porter & Alison, 2001) of those involved and/or through linguistic analysis (Woodhams, et al., 2012). In terms of young people's peer groups, research indicates that individuals

lead by ‘participating’ i.e. doing the act that they want others to do, rather than ordering (Porter, 2013:169). This is different to cases where adult offenders may direct or order a young person to offend, as has been evidenced in cases of sexual exploitation (Berelowitz, et al., 2012) and online HSB (Moultrie, 2006).

In 2001 Porter and Alison proposed a ‘behavioural coding system’ to identify leaders in MPR cases. This system, outlined in Table 1 (Porter, 2013:165), identified that individuals could lead by the actions they took or orders that they gave, at different stages during an assault.

**Table 1 Behavioural signs of leadership from Porter and Alison**

Stage	Behaviour	Code	Type
<b>Initial idea</b>	Not involved	1	-
	Decides to commit the crime of rape	2	Decision
<b>Target selection</b>	Not involved	1	-
	Selects the target	2	Decision
<b>Approach of victim</b>	Not involved	1	-
	Approaches the target	2	Action
	Orders other to approach the target	3	Order
<b>First sexual act</b>	Not involved	1	-
	Commits the first sexual act	2	Action
	Orders other to commit the first sexual act	3	Order
<b>Disposal decision</b>	Not involved	1	-
	Decides on the method of disposal of the victim	2	Decision
<b>Disposal</b>	Not involved	1	-
	Carries out the disposal	2	Action
	Both disposes and orders other to dispose of the victim	3	Action and Order
	Orders other to dispose of the victim	4	Order

While this system was originally defined for sexual offending, it may be applicable to other forms of peer-on-peer abuse that involve a group.

In addition to leaders, groups may also feature followers and bystanders. In cases of MPR and gang-associated violence at the least, young people witness the abuse of others (Allen, 2011; Beckett, et al., 2013; Firmin, 2011). Research also states that young people are more likely to discuss the abuse they experience with their peers than with adults or professionals (Barter, et al., 2009; Chung, 2005; Cossar, et al., 2013; Holland, et al., 1998). Yet, there is an implicit assumption within the discourse of ‘telling’ that abuse between young people happens in private, i.e. that a young person has to tell their friend about something that has happened as their friend did not bear witness to the act. Given their age, young people’s relationships are more likely to occur in public (as outlined in section 2.3). Knowing this, it is intriguing that peer-on-peer abuse literature, and wider studies into young people’s relationships, haven’t further studied young people witnessing their peers being abused, or abusing others, in addition to being ‘told’ about it after the fact.

MPR literature aside, there is a knowledge gap in the evidence base regarding the interplay between peer groups and instances of peer-on-peer abuse. Presently, pathways to abuse are predominantly described with reference to an individual’s experiences/vulnerabilities and those of their families – as opposed to a peer group pathway to abusive behaviours, for example. In light of the MPR literature on group dynamics, I would ask whether some individuals in a peer group could move through Hackett’s continuum of sexual behaviours in a linear fashion while influencing others to leap from one end of the continuum to the other (from normal to abusive). Rather than past or present family traumas being associated with HSB, present trauma within the peer group may be a driver for sexually abusive behaviour.

While the above questions primarily apply to peer-on-peer sexual abuse, similar enquiries could be made in instances of young people who physically and/or emotionally abuse their peers. Indeed, HSB literature is increasingly finding that young people who sexually harm their peers



share much in common with those involved in other forms of anti-social and offending behaviour (Letourneau, et al., 2013). Therefore, in all instances the question remains - what is the impact of group, and other contextual, influences on young people's behaviour, and more importantly on their culpability and/or ability to consent?

## **2.7 Consent and culpability**

Understanding groups, and other social contexts is particularly important for establishing (a lack of) consent, and culpability, in cases of peer-on-peer abuse. CSE researchers have promoted social models of consent, which locate power differentials within contexts rather than solely within an abusive relationship or individual (Brodie, 2013; Melrose, 2013; Pearce, 2013). This approach seems warranted given evidence that the contexts in which sexual violence occurs shapes the way in which consent is understood (Coy, et al., 2013).

Pearce argues that responses to CSE are built upon a medical model of consent that fails to understand the 'pressures on those who might be sexually exploited' (Pearce, 2013:52). According to Pearce

A social model of consent would address the social and environmental features that impact on young people's ability to consent and help practitioners to assess the different ways that a young person's capacity to consent can be abused, exploited and manipulated.

(Pearce, 2013:53)

The CSE policy definition recognises the interplay between agency and exploitative contexts, stating that exploitation is characterised by a young person's *limited availability* of choice rather than instances where there are no choices to be made. Young people who are sexually exploited make choices, albeit ones which are constrained by the context, relationship or situation in which the abuse occurs. Pearce's model of consent accounts

for that which is coerced (following grooming), normalised, survivalist (in response to poverty) or condoned (where professionals lay responsibility for exploitation with those who are exploited), creating a framework in which context is considered and a young person can be both a social agent and victimised. However, the phenomenon is often understood as one in which the young person is a 'passive object/victim' (Melrose, 2013:17). In order to be harmed, or be in need of help, individuals must be passive – recognition of agency disrupts a perception of dependency and surfaces attitudes of blame.

In addition to conceptualising the behaviours of those who are abused, Pearce's social model of consent opens up questions related to those who commit abusive acts. Given the evidence in the previous sub-section, the influence of peer group dynamics warrants attention when assessing the culpability of the young people involved in peer-on-peer abuse.

In their research on MPR, Porter (2013) and Allen (2011) have argued that leaders, followers and bystanders share equal responsibility for their involvement in sexual offending. Allen (2011:867) argued that those who are present but are not physically involved in an assault are criminally liable. This has been translated into policies on mandatory reporting in some US states; where bystanders who don't intervene can be criminally sanctioned (Bagby, 1999; Givelber, 1998). Similar debates have surfaced on the use of 'joint enterprise' in the UK to convict all of those present, or associated to, a serious offence such as murder (Crown Prosecution Service, 2012; House of Commons Justice Committee, 2012).

Much of this position is structured on the argument that group roles are reinforcing and that leaders are only able to act in a given way if followers or bystanders are willing to endorse/encourage their position. Without followers, leaders would not be able to fulfil their role. While this argument is accurate in terms of group roles, it is not necessarily so in terms of consent and culpability. Criminal liability as asserted by Allen may not be

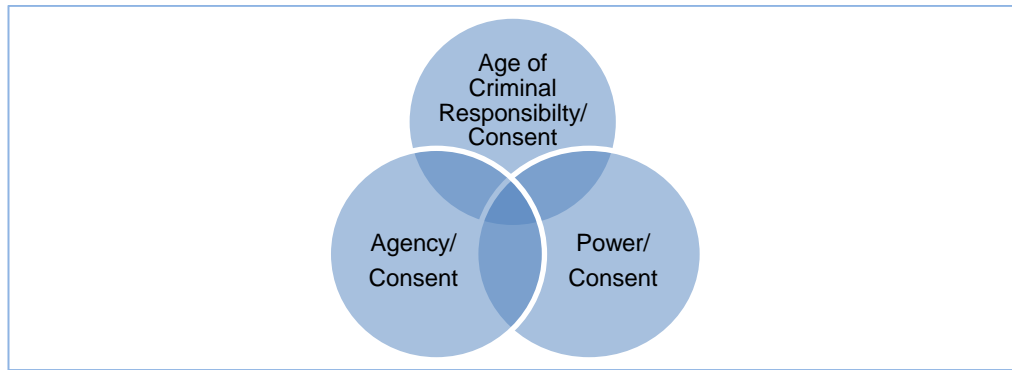
the most helpful measure for assessing the culpability of young people who abuse their peers.

Given what is known about leader's histories and behaviours external to the group (Chung, 2005; Franklin, 2004), it is likely that some would harm others alone regardless of whether they were fulfilling a leadership role. Whereas followers and bystanders may only be abusive if a harmful individual assumes a leadership role. As such Lambine suggests that

the relative culpability of each offender may be more easily determined if there are structures in place for understanding the individual roles within MPR offender groups.

(Lambine, 2013:77)

Literature on group dynamics exposes a three-way tension, at least in relation to the culpability of young people who sexually abuse their peers. Firstly, from the age of 10 they are criminally liable for the abuse they instigate or perpetrate, and yet they will not be able to legally consent to engaging in any of the sexual elements of this abuse until they are sixteen. Secondly, a young person's ability to consent will also rest upon their sense, and actual experience of, power. In a group context leaders may have more power than followers and/or bystanders, and those who don't engage may face exclusion from the group (Franklin, 2004; Pitts, 2008). This means that the group as a whole may possess one collective sense of power, whereas individuals may experience more, equal, or less power than the group as whole. Thirdly, such experiences of power impact on a young person's sense of agency, as does the group's identity. To establish culpability it seems that we need to rectify the tripartite inconsistency outlined above and illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2 Three spheres of culpability**

Furthermore, it may not be enough to conceptualise group dynamics without consideration of the social environments within which peer groups form. Coercive groups may form in response to coercive contexts (Pitts, 2008; 2013; Ralphs, Medina and Aldridge, 2009). Applying Pearce's social model of consent (2013), the literature implies that if young people's choices are influenced or constrained by environmental factors, then their sense of agency should be critically considered and as such the extent to which they are culpable and/or consenting. It is possible that a social model of culpability, as well as one of consent, is required for cases of peer-on-peer abuse.

Debates about consent and culpability are also built upon the imposition of a clear victim-perpetrator divide: the victim did not consent and the perpetrator is culpable for what has happened to that victim. The CSE definition implies a definitive victim-perpetrator divide that is reinforced in political rhetoric:

More perpetrators are being prosecuted and jailed; sending out the message, loud and clear, that those who prey on children face stiff punishment.

(Edward Timpson, Minister for Children, 2013).

Such punitive discourse is particularly unhelpful in cases of peer-on-peer abuse, where CSE research consistently evidences a victim/perpetrator overlap (Berelowitz et al., 2012; Pitts 2013). A lack of a victim/perpetrator

divide is also found in research into gang-associated young women (Beckett, et al., 2013; Densley, et al., 2013; Firmin, 2013b; Khan, et al., 2013), and perpetrators of teenage relationship abuse (Fox, et al., 2013:6). Young people within street gangs may have little power/control and therefore make constrained choices (Beckett, et al., 2013; Pitts 2008/2013). As Pitts notes

All too often gang-related sexual behaviours with which we are concerned appear to be neither wholly constrained in the sense of the coercive dyad proffered by the CSE system, nor freely chosen.

(Pitts, 2013:31).

While these arguments were borne out of research that was primarily focused on gang-associated young women, they have been used to raise questions about the relative culpability, power, and vulnerability of gang-associated young men (Beckett, et al. 2013, Berelowitz, et al. 2013, Firmin 2013a). A concern that was raised by John Pitts in 2008 in *Reluctant Gangsters*:

We describe them as 'Reluctant Gangsters'... notionally unaffiliated young people can be asked to undertake one-off tasks for gang members, which they would be unlikely to refuse, knowing the kind of retribution that refusal was likely to incur. Putting it another way, in gangland, everybody is a potential affiliate.

(Pitts, 2008:106)

Such is the overlap between victim and perpetrator status that some researchers have stated that the point at which, and contexts in which, young men are identified as perpetrators 'needs to be the subject of greater reflection' (Gadd, et al., 2013:32).

Conceptualisations of consent and culpability are central to research into peer-on-peer abuse: the former in relation to those who have been abused and the latter in terms of those deemed to be abusive. Both notions are

intrinsically linked with the concept of 'agency': i.e. does actively displaying abusive behaviours make a young person culpable for their actions? Likewise do displays of agency, rather than passivity, undermine someone's status as victimised? As with the age and gender characteristics of peer-on-peer abuse, the social models of consent and culpability explored in this sub-section underline the importance of contextualised conceptualisations of the phenomenon in question.

## **2.8 Individualisation and contextualisation**

Research into peer-on-peer abuse identifies individual characteristics and behaviours associated with the phenomenon (section 2.2). When this evidence is viewed out of context it risks presenting an individualised, rather than contextualised account of peer-on-peer abuse – a risk of increasing concern amongst academics (Barter, et al., 2009; Chung, 2005; Letourneau and Borduin 2008; Melrose, 2013).

The challenge is that victimhood is a somewhat relational concept; attempts to address it abstracted from the context in which victimisation occurs are limiting. For example, the CSE definition references exploitative contexts, yet a focus on individual young people has resulted in attempts to control their behaviours, rather than address exploitative situations, as a means of keeping them safe (Melrose, 2013). Despite national strategic plans to address CSE (DOH/Home Office, 2000; DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2011) local responses have been slow to develop (Berelowitz, et al., 2013; Jago, et al., 2011). A 2014 study of CSE practice in London found that most local authorities had begun to build a response in the previous 6-12 months, and an inability to disrupt those who were exploiting children was a persistent gap (Beckett, et al., 2014).

In England, and arguably globally, the vast majority of CSE perpetrators are unidentified (Berelowitz, et al., 2012; CEOP, 2011). As a result most CSE research and practice has developed around those labelled as 'victims'. This work has identified individual behaviours and vulnerabilities

associated with CSE (Berelowitz, et al., 2012; DCSF, 2009). Young people who go missing, misuse drugs or alcohol, and/or engage in offending are considered to be at particular risk of exploitation. Services have been commissioned in different parts of the country to provide 1:1 (direct work by one worker with one individual young person) and group work support to young people assessed as displaying these behaviours and being at risk of sexual exploitation as a result (Barnardo's, 2011; Berelowitz, et al., 2013). In response, service providers have sought to demonstrate their effectiveness by evidencing a reduction in CSE- related behaviours amongst young people, (known as 'risk factors'), following their interventions (Barnardo's, 2011b). While many examples of effective intervention have been identified and promoted (Barnardo's, 2011b; Berelowitz, et al., 2013), research has raised concerns about the individualised nature of assessment and intervention (Brodie, 2013; Melrose, 2013). Similarly research and policy on teenage relationship abuse has presented vulnerabilities associated with perpetrating such as alcohol misuse (Gadd. et al., 2013), in isolation of the social contexts in which these occur.

In the most extreme cases, attempts to reduce the 'risky behaviours' of young people who are being sexually exploited can lead to them being relocated, placed into care, or secured (Farmer and Pollock, 2003; Shuker, 2013). This practice referred to as 'disruption by distance' (Shuker, 2013:130) attempts to safeguard young people from abuse by removing them from the exploitative context within which they have been harmed.

Such practice is problematic. As Shuker (2013) notes, relocation seeks the physical safety of a young person in the absence of 'relational' or 'ontological' safety, whereas all three are required to safeguard a young person from sexual exploitation. Such is the impact of this form of abuse, in disrupting a young person's safe relationships and internal sense of self,

that the three-pronged approach to safety (physical, relational and ontological) proposed by Shuker seems a minimum requirement.

Historically, CSE has been conceptualised with reference to individual agency and behaviours, and a power imbalance centred on age. Likewise, assessment and interventions have been concerned with addressing 'risky behaviours' of young people who been sexually exploited, rather than the risky contexts in which their agency is displayed. Increasingly, a critical research base has questioned an individualised model and called for social approaches to conceptualisation, assessment and intervention. Brodie argues that 'a greater focus on the structures of social disadvantage that underpin CSE...may be most critical to address the problem' (Brodie, 2013:95). Likewise, Melrose, drawing upon Cabezas (1998) and Fucso (1998) contests that the individualisation of sexual exploitation does not:

identify the specific social processes that create the conditions for exploitation nor facilitate an understanding of what might be wrong with a society in which sex appears as a best option for those who are vulnerable and/or financially impoverished.

(Melrose, 2013:17)

Differentially, studies into gang-related violence consistently consider both the individual characteristics of gang-associated young people (Centre for Social Justice, 2009; Khan, et al., 2013) and the environmental and social drivers of serious youth violence (Beckett, et al., 2013; Off Centre, 2013; Pitts, 2008; 2013). The notion of the 'gang-affected neighbourhood' and its impact on young people's sense of self, choice and identity has been well documented (Harding, 2012; Pitts, 2008; Ralphs, Medina and Aldridge, 2009; Wacquant, 2008; Young, 1999). According to the literature, when living in violent social spaces gang involvement can appear to be a 'rational choice' (Cepeda and Valdez, 2003:15), and act as a means of securing safety. Such environments can lead to a 'survivalist mentality'



(Hallsworth and Young, 2011:68), where young people use violence as a means of navigating harmful social spaces. In total this research base evidences that the social rules in neighbourhoods and other social environments inform individual decision making.

However, despite the contextualised evidence base, statutory responses to gang-associated violence are as individualistic as they are for CSE. For example: gang-associated young women are not identifiable using standard individualised assessments for gang association which measure behaviours of young men (MOPAC, 2013a) and services were commissioned to provide 1:1 support for individual young women affected by gang-associated sexual violence, in the absence of environmental change (Home Office, 2011b). This contrasts directly with young women's and young men's accounts of gang-associated violence, which explicitly reference fear of the peer network as a barrier to seeking support or making disclosures (Beckett, et al., 2013; Firmin, 2011; Pitts, 2008)

Following critique from scholars such as Letourneau and Borduin (2008), HSB interventions have sought to contextualise abusive behaviours in a way that CSE interventions largely fail to do. Assessment tools such as AIM/AIM2 (Morrison and Henniker, 2006), resilience-based models (Hackett, 2006), and interventions such as multi-systemic therapy (MST) are built upon ecological theory (Henggeler, et al., 2009; Letourneau, et al., 2009). As a result they contextualise young people's experiences within the systems that they navigate, recognising the impact that all of these may have on their behaviour.

Yet, greater interrogation of the research around AIM2 and MST implies that while the peer group and school are recognised as influential, the primary focus of intervention remains the family (Hackett, 2014; Henggeler, et al., 2009; Letourneau, et al., 2009). Indeed, peer groups are included in the broader 'environment' category of the AIM2 assessments, whereas family is a category on its own. In the case of MST evaluations, deviant peers and lack of parental discipline were identified as central

factors associated to young people with HSB. However, the latter factor was addressed by changing parental behaviour whereas the former was tackled by removing a young person from their peer group rather than changing peer group behaviour (Henggeler, et al., 2009; 2013). In short: the intervention remained largely focused on improving the nature of the family environment while the harmful peers persisted, simply disconnected from the individual young person of concern.

Research into peer-on-peer abuse emphasises the importance of context in informing power, consent, culpability and agency. However, to varying extents, it has simultaneously published evidence on individualised vulnerabilities and behaviours associated with the phenomenon abstracted from the contexts in which the abuse occurs. Those authors who locate behaviours within the social contexts are better able to accommodate a response to young ‘perpetrators’ as both abusing and abused (e.g. Barter, Chung, Hackett, Letourneau, Melrose, Pitts, Shuker, and Pearce). Despite these developments, the evidence implies that while social context is recognised as important, the nature of the interplay between environments and individual agency in cases of peer-on-peer abuse is yet to be sufficiently interrogated.

## **2.9 Peer-on-peer abuse literature – conclusion**

Research into teenage relationship abuse, CSE, HSB, serious youth violence and MPR all have a bearing on how we conceptualise and understand peer-on-peer abuse. Taken as a whole, they demonstrate that the phenomenon:

- involves physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- is gender and age specific
- involves both individuals and groups
- occurs within social contexts that may endorse or challenge the existence of that abuse, impacting upon consent and culpability.

Harmful contexts, as well as risk and vulnerability characteristics, can impact on young people's exposure to, and involvement in, peer-on-peer abuse. To differing extents, literature identifies young people's histories of abuse within their families as a pathway to instigating peer-on-peer abuse or being victimised. Some areas of literature are also alert to the relevance of hegemonically masculine ideals to violent peer groups, neighbourhoods and other social contexts that set parameters of consent and facilitate acts of peer-on-peer abuse. Despite this awareness, a consistent challenge across the literature is a tendency to individualise the problem of peer-on-peer abuse, locating the issue within vulnerable characteristics of children and families. Even when one recognises harmful social contexts and group dynamics the impact of these environments in constructing harmful social norms that underpin peer-on-peer abuse is insufficiently explored.

Layered on top, underneath, and all around individual experiences of group dynamics are the gendered and age-specific socially constructed contexts within which the group exists. A contextualised approach to peer-on-peer abuse raises a number of questions:

- In what ways do young people who harm within groups experience power and consent and are therefore culpable for the harm they cause?
- To what extent does the reproduction of harmful ideas and behaviours within social contexts including peer groups, schools, and neighbourhoods, influence individual agency?
- What is the relationship between the norms in different social contexts, and the agency of individuals who navigate those environments?

Literature on peer-on-peer abuse is yet to sufficiently answer to these questions, and so my study will attempt to do so.

In order to create a methodology with which to answer these questions the following chapter provides a gendered and age-specific account of Bourdieusian social theory. In doing so a theoretical framework in which to explore the phenomenon of peer-on-peer abuse will be developed.

### **3. Literature review: the theoretical framework for this study**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

A critical examination of peer-on-peer abuse research (chapter two) indicates that in order to conceptualise the phenomenon, the *interplay* between the individuals and social contexts that feature needs to be understood. Relying on any individual social context or structure, be that the family or the peer group, or abstracted characteristics such as gender or age, appears insufficient: not every peer group will engage in sexual violence, and only a minority of young people are thought to abuse their peers. Literature implies that 'rules' within peer groups and other social contexts can condone or facilitate abusive relationships, attitudes and behaviours, but which social script carries more weight remains contested (Connolly, et al., 2000; Franklin, 2013; Holland et al., 1998).

With reference to both sociological theories of childhood (Jenks, 2005) and hegemonic theories of gender (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), this chapter will outline how Bourdieu's 'constructivist structuralism' (1990) offers a theoretical lens through which to explore the *interplay* between social contexts (social fields) and individual social agents (habitus).

With the exception of *Masculine Domination* (2001), Bourdieu's social theory said relatively little about gender and age, instead being largely focused on the concept of 'class'. Yet feminist and childhood scholars have drawn upon his conceptual relationship between habitus and social field to transcend the theoretical structure/agency divide in their studies of socio-cultural matters such as the notions of 'consent' and young people's agency (Adkins, 2003; Jenks, 2005; Light, 2007; Powell, 2008; Skeggs,

2004). These studies have demonstrated how the proposed interplay allows for individual agency and alternative social scripts (Light, 2007; Powell, 2008), despite criticisms that Bourdieu's proposal is deterministic and doesn't explain how social norms change and adapt (Butler, 1999). In exploring this debate, with specific reference to gender and age, this chapter will provide a theoretical basis upon which to develop my primary research.

### **3.2 Constructivist structuralism: field, habitus and symbolic violence**

Bourdieu (1990) posits that the agency/structure dyad is fallacious and instead interplay between the two should be explored. For McNay (2004:176), in using Bourdieu one can recognise gender as a 'lived relation' enabling social beings to be understood through experience in relation to context. Such an approach accommodates the need to recognise agency whilst contextualising peer-on-peer abuse as explored in chapter two. Bourdieu argues that structures are both constructed and constructing and explores this reflexivity through notions of 'field', 'habitus' and 'symbolic violence'.

Comprising four kinds of social capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic (i.e. prestige or reputation) social fields set the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1990). Individuals are distributed within social fields, forming hierarchies, with reference to their ability to realise the rules of the game. These rules are internalised by the social agent's 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus refers to an individual's 'feel' for the rules of any given social field. The rules are pursued, and therefore socially constructed and reproduced, through the behaviour and mental discourse of social agents.

On some occasions subordinated individuals can engage in 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 2001); a reproduction of the rules, resigned to the idea that there is no achievable alternative, even when this is to their own detriment. Symbolic violence, Bourdieu argues, cannot be addressed

through simple exposure to alternative social scripts – the habitus needs to actively engage in that which is different to what it has embodied:

Because the foundation of symbolic violence lies not in mystified consciousness that only need to be enlightened but in dispositions attuned to the structure of domination of which they are the produce, the relation of complicity that the victims of symbolic domination grant to the dominant can only be broken through a radical transformation of the social conditions of production of the dispositions that lead the dominated to take the point of view of the dominant on the dominant themselves.

(Bourdieu, 2001:41-42)

Bourdieu's social theory has been critiqued on two main counts: firstly that it doesn't sufficiently account for individual agency and secondly that it assumes a 'universality' about human action that does not exist.

Scholars such as Butler (1999) have argued against Bourdieu's social theory on the basis that he overemphasised structure while providing an inadequate account of agency. In a similar vein other theorists have raised concern that the notion of 'symbolic violence' is too deterministic to allow for social change (Butler, 1999; Fowler, 2004; McRobbie, 2004). However, the embodiment of social rules, and the *generative capacity* of the habitus, proposed by Bourdieu ensures that individuals are agents who do, rather than subjects who are done to. This is said by others to offer an alternative to Foucault's 'tendency to determinism' (McNay, 2003:97). While social fields may create constraints, Bourdieu's social theory still provides an account of agency, which at times seems 'pessimistic' but is not 'deterministic' (Lawler, 2004:124). As McNay argues, with reference to gender, social rules are 'entrenched but not unsurpassable' (McNay, 2003: 99), a position reminiscent of Holland, et al's theory of the 'male in the head' which tried to distinguish 'the kinds of resistance that can be

contained within the rules of the game from those which seek to change the rules' (1998:156).

The identified pessimism in Bourdieu's social theory, however, does warrant further attention. Both McRobbie (2004) and Fowler (2004) identify that the idea of social reproduction in the interplay between the field/s and habitus potentially stifles any possibility of alteration. Likewise Powell (2008; 2010) notes the inclination to conclude that change is not possible in the face of social reproduction. However, Bourdieu (1990:9) contends that individuals are active in the reproductive process and as such the relationship between field and habitus is 'reflexive': people are not 'puppets' of the field. In identifying a space for individual action Bourdieu identifies that behaviours and attitudes of the habitus are not determined. Multiple social fields, and therefore rules, are in operation at any one time, with boundaries demarcated by their sphere of influence. The habitus will reproduce specific rules to which it is accustomed until it engages in an alternative field. Such interaction creates opportunities for the habitus to adapt. Therefore, in order to preserve the value of the Bourdieusian endeavour, some scholars who have made this critique (Fowler, 2004; McRobbie, 2004) suggest that change should be considered 'in regard to a shift in the conditions of social reproduction' (Adkins, 2004:9). The means by which one can locate change in this way will be held in mind throughout my application of Bourdieu's social theory.

While the critique of structure over agency has been addressed, Dreyfus and Rabinow's (1995) contention that Bourdieu's social theory is based upon an inaccurate conceptualisation of human action as striving towards a universal meaning – that of achieving status through the four forms of social capital – is more challenging. They identify a potential contradiction in the idea that social agents navigate fields which are difficult to transcend while also asserting that social agents are motivated by following the rules, and gaining status vis-à-vis capital, within a social field. Why would social agents seek to transcend fields in which they are all



striving for identical goals? Such concerns are echoed in critiques that Bourdieu provides an insufficient account of emotion in relation to the habitus – a motivation not in accordance with areas of capital he proposed (Lawler, 2004; Reay, 2004; Skeggs, 2004). In accounts of emotional motivation individuals are galvanised to resist the rules, or to change them, due to feelings of ‘rage’ for example rather than as a pursuit of capital gain. As this critique is unanswered by Bourdieu and proponents of his work, the pursuits of individual agency will be scrutinised in this study, and the critique returned to in the conclusion of my thesis. If, as critics have argued, human action is motivated by diverse pursuits, including emotional capital, then it may be possible to broaden the notion of field to incorporate a greater diversity of rules which are embodied by the habitus, without abandoning the field/habitus approach.

The benefit of applying Bourdieu’s theory to the exploration of gender inequality has been demonstrated by a number of feminist authors (Adkins, 2004; McRobbie, 2004; Powell, 2008; Skeggs, 2004). One scholar of particular importance for my study is Anastasia Powell. Powell used Bourdieu’s constructivist structuralism to explore Australian young people’s attitudes towards ‘consent’. In adopting this theoretical approach Powell argued that young people embodied social rules of consent which they acted out through behavioural cues far more than in explicit discourse: i.e. they were more likely to give physical signs that they were not consenting than saying ‘no’ to a partner, such as appearing withdrawn. Powell argued that these interactions reproduced relational gender inequality, creating conducive environments for sexual violence. As a result some young women engaged in acts of ‘symbolic violence’: resigned to their lack of power to alter the rules of their social milieu they engaged in sexual behaviours that, would the rules be different, they may not have employed.

Based on these findings, Powell (2008:180) calls for a tandem approach to sexual violence prevention that challenges the actions of individuals while

simultaneously changing the structurally reproduced rules of which such behaviour is a manifestation.

Powell's application of Bourdieu's social theory is particularly important in that it also draws upon notions of gender and age. Given the gendered and age-specific dimensions of peer-on-peer abuse outlined in chapter 2, it is critical to apply and develop Bourdieu's references to the age and gendered aspect of the field/habitus relationship to my study.

### **3.3 Gender, age and social fields**

According to Bourdieu, social fields set the rules of gender relations and boundaries of childhood that young people in turn embody and reproduce through habitus:

Through the experience of the 'sexually ordered social order and the explicit reminders addressed to them by their parents, teachers and peers, themselves endowed with principles of vision acquired in similar experiences of the world, girls internalize, in the form of schemes of perception and appreciation not readily accessible to the consciousness, the principles of dominant vision which lead them to find the social order, such as it is, normal or even natural in a sense to anticipate their destiny, refusing the courses of careers from which they are anyway excluded and rushing towards those which are in any case destined (Bourdieu, 2002:95)

Applications of Bourdieusian theory (McRobbie, 2004; Powell, 2008), imply that the extent to which such gendered trajectories can be disrupted is informed by young people's engagement with varied, as opposed to equivalent, social rules: a process that influences their capacity to adopt and embody alternative gendered and age-specific practices. For the purposes of my study, theories of childhood and hegemonic masculinities will be used to develop a gendered and age-specific version of constructivist structuralism.

Like Bourdieusian social theory, Connell (1995) and later with Messerschmidt (2005) proposed a *relational* concept of gender, 'hegemonic masculinities':

the form of masculinity in any given historical and society-wide setting that structures and legitimates hierarchical gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men.

(Messerschmidt, 2012a:59)

Despite its extensive use, the concept of hegemonic masculinities has been critiqued (Hearn, 2004; Hearn and Whitehead, 2006), and on occasion adapted or developed to advance its application and maintain its relevance (Budgeon, 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Morrell et al., 2014). Scholars have critiqued the concept on grounds including that it:

- is misunderstood and therefore misused (Hearn, 2004)
- insufficiently accounts for power and domination (Hearn, 2004)
- fails to clarify, exactly what masculine characteristics are hegemonic or acknowledges how these differ across contexts (Hearn and Whitehead, 2006)
- focuses solely on structure to the extent that the subject is lost (Whitehead, 2002).

Much of these critiques were answered or addressed by Connell and Messerschmidt's 2005 reformulation of Connell's 1995 conceptualisation. Having accepted the limitations posed by both referencing character traits of masculinity and asserting a 'global' pattern of dominance, they proposed a more contextual account of gender relations. Through their revision they recognised that:

- there are varied masculinities and multiple productions of hegemonic masculinities

- a range of behaviours occur in pursuit of hegemonically masculine ideals and structures, and these should be understood in relation to the context in which that behaviour occurs
- those who embody 'subordinated masculinities' or 'emphasised femininities' have agency and can reinforce or support hegemonically masculine structures

In light of these revisions scholars have continued to apply and develop the hegemonic masculinities concept, scrutinising the possibility of: hegemonic femininities (Burgeon, 2014), resistance to hegemonically masculine norms (Light, 2007), and the involvement of subordinated groups, including women, in sustaining hegemonically masculine gender relations (Talbot and Quayle, 2010).

Hearn's suggestion that we should move from discussing hegemonic masculinities to the hegemony of men is not necessarily addressed by these advances (2004). He contends that such an approach would enable an 'examination of that which sets the agenda for different ways of being men in relation to women, children and other men' (2004:60), elsewhere suggesting that it is relations between men that are potentially of greatest significance for their use of violence against women (Hearn and Whitehead, 2006). Hearn's position is helpful in offering a framework for exploring the relational element of hegemony and the motivations behind a pursuit of this ideal. However, his focus on men, and their relationships with one another, women and children are of limited use when examining young people's relationships – with them arguably being children and not the men to which Hearn makes reference. The question remains as to how we understand relations between boys and young men, with adult women, adult men, young women, and younger children. As such while gender relations between all these groups will be explored through the constructivist structuralist lens of my study, this will occur through the primary lens of hegemonic masculinity.

The above endeavour is enabled by other scholarly applications of hegemonic masculinities to studies of young people. Light's ethnographic account of a rugby team in an Australian secondary school provides one such example (2007). Importantly, Light places the subject at the centre of his study, identifying attempts by young men to resist the hegemonically masculine norms to which their school operated. Utilising Bourdieu he is able to evidence how, when engaging in the alternative social field of a rugby carnival that played to different rules, young men were able to pursue a different set of gender social norms. However when returning to school, rule transference was far more challenging and the team returned to the original standards set by their school. Light's study demonstrates the agent/structure relationship, proposed by Bourdieu and recognised by Connell and Messerschmidt, as well as the importance of the peer collective, and schools, in enabling young men to embody alternative gender relations. Light achieves an account which recognises the relational dependency of young people on structures, adults, and peer influence, for setting gender norms.

Many studies have recognised schools (EVAW, 2010; Maxwell and Aggleton, 2010; Paechter, 2006; Ringrose and Renold, 2011; Smith, 2007; Stanley, et al., 2011); and peer groups (Barter, et al., 2009; Connolly, et al. 2000; Chung, 2005; Franklin, 2004; Holland et al., 1998) as gendered sites of social influence for young people. Considering both sites in their study into 'young masculinities' in the UK, Frosh, et al (2002) argued that hegemonically masculine ideals, while largely unachievable, were the markers against which both young men measured themselves and their peers/adults measured them. Therefore, where school policy or practice reinforces hegemonically masculine gender relations, as in Light's study, it fails to provide a context in which alternative gender norms can be embodied.

In addition to schools and peer groups, the internet and commercial structures (Flood, 2009; Horvath, et al., 2013; Rewind&Reframe, 2014;

Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009), residential children's homes (Barter, 2006) and neighbourhoods (Anderson, 1999; Wood, Barter, and Berridge, 2011), have been associated with young people's attitudes towards gender and relationships. Indeed, in exploring pathways to crime amongst young men and young women Messerschmidt (2012b) identifies that the home, the school, the street, and the interplay between these, and with individuals, is of primary importance. He calls for further research into the interplay between these 'sites' of hegemonic masculinity in order to understand young people's involvement in crime.

Identifying and exploring the sites in which young people reinforce or resist hegemonically masculine gender relations is important for recognising the potentially age-specific characteristics of peer-on-peer abuse. Like gender, sociological literature evidences that a range of social factors delineate childhood, most of which have little to do with biology. Childhood is 'a specific structural and cultural component of many societies' (James and Prout, 1990:8) as are notions of 'adolescent' and 'teenager' (Coleman, 1992; 2011)<sup>11</sup>. While it has been constructed to isolate a time of 'development' towards adulthood, 'childhood':

makes reference to a socially constructed sense of change pertaining to the young individual which is encoded within a series of benchmarks relevant to the topical or predominant form of discourse.

(Jenks, 2005:37)

Childhood theorists have considered young people's agency with reference to the socially constructed idea that during this demarcated time young people are expected to 'do as they are told' and are (legally) dependent upon others for their well-being (James and James, 2004;

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed the study of 'youth', 'teenagers' and 'adolescence' identifies a socially constructed time in which young individuals are adults in waiting, stuck between spaces of childhood and adulthood – in some cases until they turn 25, even though there are no specific legal or social structures which earmark 25 as a shift from youth to adult (Sibley 1995; Skelton and Valentine 1998).

Jenks 2005). Drawing upon Bourdieu, Jenks considers young people's individual agency in relation to social contexts that inform their notions of 'self'. Jenks asks what it is about the rules of the game, and the hierarchies within social fields, that contribute to young people's behaviours:

Instead of asking 'Why is my child a heroin addict? What went wrong in his or her development' we should, from a sociological perspective, be asking 'What is it about this free, liberal, advanced, technological democracy that makes heroin a desirable, alternative possible course of action?' Development through dependency then becomes an instrument in the process of social and cultural reproduction.

(Jenks, 2005:40)

Jenks's reference to 'development through dependency' contributes to an understanding of the interplay between agency and gendered social fields amongst young people. Jenks notes that during 'childhood' young people are structurally and socially *dependent* upon sites such as the family, the school, and broader societal constructs that have also been identified as contexts of hegemonically masculine reproduction. As such identities, and behaviours, are informed by the social rules in those settings.

In considering Bourdieusian accounts of hegemonic masculinity (Light, 2007) and childhood (Jenks, 2005) I would ask what the relationship is between the various social fields considered in the literature, and how this in turn interplays with individual agency. For example, if a young man attends a school where the social rules promote hegemonic masculine ideals, and these ideals are adopted by his peer group who are also informed by pornography, where is the field that offers an alternative script? The presence of non-hegemonic social rules, should they be embodied and practiced, may harness the 'generative capacity of the habitus' (Powell, 2008: 171), and therefore individual agency, to behave in a different way. Such questions are essential for exploring this study's

hypothesis that peer-on-peer abuse is informed by gendered and age-specific hierarchies within and external to young people's relationships, and identifying the safeguarding implications of a socio-cultural account of the phenomenon.

### **3.4 Conclusion: peer-on-peer abuse and constructivist structuralism**

The age and gender specific interpretation of constructivist structuralism proposed in this chapter will enable an account of peer-on-peer abuse that can explore:

- gendered and age-specific relations between young men, and young women and young men, particularly in relation to peer groups
- the interplay between young people and gendered social sites upon which they are dependent for their development
- the opportunities and limitations for young people, as social agents, to act against harmful gender norms that may underpin peer-on-peer abuse

When these factors are considered with reference to the evidence-base on peer-on-peer abuse, three key theoretical approaches are identified through which current gaps in evidence can be explored.

#### ***Interplay and contextualisation***

Firstly, identifying the interplay between habitus and social fields in cases of peer-on-peer abuse will assist me in measuring the extent to which the reproduction of hegemonically masculine relations within social contexts including peer groups, school, and neighbourhoods influence individual agency.

The concept of social field / agency interplay provides a means to explore the scholarly critiques of individualised conceptualisations of peer-on-peer



abuse. In emphasising the interplay between field and habitus, the version of constructivist structuralism offered provides a theoretical framework in which individual vulnerabilities associated with peer-on-peer abuse can be conceived of in relation to the age-specific and gendered contexts in which they occur. By allowing for multi-way relationships between various social fields, individuals and groups, this approach accommodates the idea that social norms within a peer group are also related to broader social structures and the behaviour/ attitudes of the individuals who make up the group.

Furthermore, literature examined in chapter two implied age and gender specific dimensions to group-based abuse that are pertinent to understanding the relationship between agency and structure. Young people are more likely to lead others through participating in, rather than directing, abusive acts (Porter, 2013) – demonstrating their adherence to masculine norms (Franklin 2013). Leading and following through participation implies something about the way in which those involved may ‘put into action the incorporated principles of a generative habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990:9). As implied by Bourdieu (1990), and further developed by Powell (2008) and Light (2007), in order for young people in such cases to behave differently they may need others to ‘act’ in an alternative field rather than hearing what difference looks like – countering action with action rather than with directives.

### ***The generative capacity of habitus and social models of consent and culpability***

Secondly, an interrogation of the extent to which the rules within all the social fields involved in cases of peer-on-peer abuse are in accordance, or discordance with one another, will assist in identifying the potential for social change. Should analysis identify fields which open up alternative choices for young people the potential to act differently will be created. Whereas, if all fields upon which young people are dependent promote

ideals or behaviours that underpin peer-on-peer abuse the potential for different outcomes is limited.

Chapter two outlined debates related to consent, culpability, and ultimately young people's agency in cases of peer-on-peer abuse. The concept of 'habitus', when aligned with notions of young people's development through dependency, provides a theoretical framework for examining social models of both consent and culpability. Based on Bourdieu's theory, young people have agency and make choices. However, in accordance with peer-on-peer abuse literature, theories of childhood, and applications of hegemonically masculinities theory to young people, these choices are informed by the rules within contexts upon which they are dependent for their development. Given that young people's dependency on social contexts characterises their interaction with fields then it follows that consent and culpability should be conceptualised with reference to this interplay.

The challenge with the above proposition, as alluded to in chapter two, is that it is currently applied to inconsistent, and relatively arbitrary, boundaries of childhood. When an individual abuses their peer alternative parameters of childhood are called upon, such as the age of criminal responsibility (10 in England) and the age of consent to sexual activity (16 in England), which are inconsistent with the boundaries of childhood enshrined in UK law and the UNCRC. This means that the phenomenon of peer-on-peer abuse interacts with three separate notions of childhood which each imply different things about young people's capacity to make decisions, i.e. their agency.

The theoretical building blocks upon which my study is built will consider consent and culpability in peer-on-peer abuse in relation to the fields in which young people act as agents; while recognising that safeguarding responses may instead be using constructions of childhood, and not social context, to understand agency and determine culpability/consent as a result.

### ***Symbolic violence and the victim-perpetrator divide***

Finally, in order to understand the ways in which young people who harm within groups experience power and consent, the interplay between social fields, groups, and individual agency requires exploration in this study. Interrogation of this interplay, and the extent to which the abuse involved is 'symbolic', will assist in creating a social account of young people's culpability in cases of peer-on-peer abuse.

The concept of symbolic violence, and the involvement of subordinated groups in reinforcing hegemonically masculine structures, illuminates literary debates about the victim/perpetrator dyad, young people's sense of power and their pathways to abusive behaviours. As outlined in chapter two, embodying the hegemonically masculine rules of social fields young people may engage in abusive behaviours which arguably sustain their own subordination as well as harm others. These acts of symbolic violence are well accounted for in literature on gang-related violence that identifies young people who, being victimised while also victimising others, are resolved to the idea that peer-on-peer abuse was inevitable in their neighbourhoods:

I wouldn't say they're forced, but they're kind of egged on. Does that make sense? It's not like they're sat with a gun telling them 'you must do this' but if you're a member of a gang you've got to do it. They're not going to say 'no' cos you're going to be the pussy of the gang, and because you're involved with that environment, you think fuck it and just do it...I don't think it'll be so much them being forced, but I think, what's the word where you're pressured? (Participant C, 23 year old young woman).

(Beckett, et al., 2013:41)

Such findings suggest that when the neighbourhoods measures status, respect, and ultimately gender hierarchy, through the use of violence

young people may become violent, even ‘reluctantly’ (Pitts, 2008). Echoing the work of Messerschmidt (2012b) outlined in sub-section 3.3, Jock Young identifies the reproduction of hegemonic masculinities within neighbourhoods where young men are both exposed to violence and are excluded from so-called ‘legitimate means’ of realising masculinity:

young men facing denial of recognition turn...to the creation of cultures of machismo, to the mobilization of one of their only resources, physical strength, to the formation of gangs and to the defence of their own turf. Being denied the respect of others they create a subculture that revolves around masculine powers and respect.

(Young, 1999:12)

However, as Franklin, Powell and others have noted, the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity is not restricted to those who are excluded from powerful echelons of society – hence the involvement of American fraternities in sexual violence (Franklin, 2004). Much of this debate rests upon the extent to which one accepts that masculine identity resides with status and power – and to what extent these social rules are challenged. In their report on gangs and serious youth violence the Centre for Social Justice argued that gang membership fulfils a ‘desire for status, respect, material wealth and sense of belonging [which] are key drivers of human behaviour’ (Centre for Social Justice, 2009:35). However, akin to Dreyfus and Rabinow’s critique of Bourdieu (1995), I would question whether these are *naturally* key drivers of *all* human behaviour, or just that which exists in social fields that prioritise those so-called ‘desires’. Based on the work of Franklin it is clear that such desires transcend social class groupings within ‘Western’ social fields, and masculine status is achieved through the use of sexual violence across groups.

The above raises questions, eluded to by Powell (2008) and McRobbie (2004), as to whether safeguarding practice should approach young

people's demonstration of symbolic violence by accepting their pursuit of hegemonic masculinity and trying to change the actions they undertake to realise these rules, or whether the rules themselves need to be addressed: a fundamental question to be explored throughout my study.

Although young people display agency, literature on peer-on-peer abuse, and the theoretical framework proposed in this chapter, imply that they are also dependent on others to inform their choices and keep them safe. In order to assess the safeguarding implications of the theoretical approach proposed, I will now outline current safeguarding and child protection policy responses to peer-on-peer abuse.

## **4. Literature review: child protection and safeguarding**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In addition to conceptualising peer-on-peer abuse with reference to the contexts in which it occurs, this study will explore the safeguarding implications of such an approach. Having critically examined the evidence base on peer-on-peer abuse (chapter two), and developed a theoretical approach through to which to explore this evidence (chapter three), this chapter considers current safeguarding responses to the phenomenon in question.

In order to do so, it is important to note that child protection and safeguarding policy is built upon the socially constructed notions of childhood outlined in the previous chapter (Coleman, 1992; James and Prout, 1990; Jenks, 2005; Skelton and Valentine, 1998). The identification of those who are in need of protection, therefore, rests on parameters which include the:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child which states that an individual is a child up to the age of 18 (Article 1: UNCRC 1989)
- Age of consent to sexual activity (16 years)
- Minimum age of criminal responsibility (10 years).

Additionally, academics such as Warrington (2013) have identified tensions in the implementation of the UNCRC in regard to agency and dependency. While not essentially discordant, Warrington suggests that, on occasions where young people repeatedly return to those who are harming them (and thus engage in forms of symbolic violence), the 'agency' alluded to in article 12, (the right for every child to have the right

to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously) is sometimes interpreted as conflicting with article 19 that requires governments to do all they can to protect children from abuse.

With reference to the boundaries of childhood, the evidence base on peer-on-peer abuse, and constructivist structuralism, this chapter will explore child protection and safeguarding responses to the phenomenon in question. This will be achieved through consideration of child protection and safeguarding: policy and theory; practice in relation to young people; responses to peer-on-peer abuse; and engagement with social fields.

In adopting this approach the efficacy of the system to protect young people who are affected by peer-on-peer abuse is called into question.

#### **4.2 Child protection theory and policy**

While children have been abused throughout history, Corby, et al., identify 1870 as the year when one can see a 'clear thread between the social organisation around the problem of child abuse that started at that time and has continued until now' (2012:25). From this point onwards child protection and safeguarding theory developed to respond to the abuse of children in their homes (Corby, et al., 2012), and academics / decision-makers have explored tensions with the ideological and practical feasibility of the state intervening with family life (Corby, 1996; Corby, et al., 2012). This exploration, along with high profile child deaths at one end and unnecessary removal of children from their families at the other, has resulted in arguments fluctuating between interventionist and supportive approaches to families in which children are at risk of harm (Corby, et al., 2012; Department of Health, 1998). Regardless of whether policymakers and/or researchers' preference interventionist or supportive models, the overarching remit of UK child protection systems is one that seeks to reduce the likelihood of a child being harmed within their home.

The formalisation of this system developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and the Children Act 1989 provided the statutory framework for child protection

and safeguarding in England that has been adopted to date. In the statutory guidance which followed under the 2004 Children Act, agencies were required to: protect children from maltreatment; prevent impairment of children's health or development; and ensure that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care. Furthermore, significant harm was defined as:

Any physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, accident or injury that is sufficiently serious to adversely affect progress and enjoyment of life. Harm is defined as the ill treatment or impairment of health and development.

(Department for Education, 2010:1)

When a child, up to the age of 18, is deemed at risk of significant harm as defined above, agencies are required to work together, within a statutory framework, to keep them safe. Policy documents invariably specify that abuse by parents, or within the family home, is the chief concern of the significant harm definition (Department of Health, 2010). However, given that peer-on-peer abuse involves a spectrum of violent incidences which include young people being raped, murdered, controlled and severely physically assaulted, I would argue the phenomenon is captured by the definition of significant harm, albeit harm that which occurs beyond the home.

Beyond definitions, the processes and structures employed for child protection and safeguarding determine that the primary concern is abuse within the home. Child protection conferences and the procedures that lead towards them are built around the concept of family (Corby, et al., 2012:183). Indeed care or supervision orders can only be considered when the significant harm definition outlined above has been met along with evidence that this harm is 'attributable to the care given to the child...or the child's being beyond parental control' (Section 31 (2) Children Act 1989). The most recent review of the child protection system by Eileen Munro



reiterated the focus on the family. A review of her 2011 recommendations indicates a sole focus on how the system responds to children, young people and their families (Munro, 2011). None of this should be much of a surprise when one considers the original objectives of the child protection lobby as outlined by Jenks:

The theorizing within the child protection movement sanctified the family and a view of the necessary role of the properly patterned relationship between men and women in promoting healthy and thriving environments for the child.

(2005:100)

Given that the literature identifies the locations and pathways to peer-on-peer abuse being situated in a myriad of social fields beyond the home and the individual, the child protection system is currently theoretically and practically ill-positioned to offer an effective response.

The introduction of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) in the Children Act 2004 provided a broader remit that could potentially address the gaps identified above. Bringing together a range of local agencies/sectors including health, police, housing, and education the primary function of LSCBs was to strategically coordinate their services and 'hold agencies to account for their statutory duty to safeguard children' (Corby, et al., 2012:79). This broader remit was reinforced under the Labour Government's Every Child Matters (ECM) policy. The approach focused agencies on preventative safeguarding mechanisms through universal service provision to ensure children and young people were safeguarded in five key areas. While ECM is no longer Government policy, LSCBs remain in operation. Although their broader focus on safeguarding presents opportunities, I would argue that ultimately LSCBs remain strategically focused on how individual agencies work together to support individual families and young people – a position that I will explore below.

### **4.3 Child protection and young people**

Holding the definition of significant harm in mind, the child protection system has come under increased scrutiny for its inability to appropriately safeguard and protect young people (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2013; House of Commons Education Committee, 2012; Ofsted 2011). In a review of serious case reviews in 2011, Ofsted identified that the two most vulnerable age groups were those under the age of one and individuals aged 14 and over. In terms of the latter group Ofsted found that:

- agencies had focused on the young person's challenging behaviour, seeing them as hard to reach or rebellious, rather than trying to understand the causes of the behaviour and the need for sustained support
- young people were treated as adults rather than being considered as children, because of confusion about the young person's age and legal status or a lack of age-appropriate facilities
- there was no coordinated approach to the young people's needs and practitioners had not always recognised the important contribution of their agency in achieving this.

(Ofsted, 2011:18)

Likewise the Education Select Committee concluded that their Inquiry had 'revealed a worrying picture with regard to the protection and support of older children...we cannot shoehorn them into our existing child protection system' (House of Commons Education Select Committee, 2012:56). Such evidence of professionals holding young people responsible for their own abuse, being too challenging to work with, or 'voting with their feet', is echoed in the peer-on-peer abuse literature outlined in chapter two.

Returning to the concepts of agency, consent and childhood explored in chapters two and three, critiques of child protection practice suggest that when a young person displays agency, the ability of the system to recognise them as a child in need of protection can be compromised. By

‘child protection’ system, one might infer that a ‘passive person protection’ system is more apt: once someone’s agency leads to them being seen as having contributed, in some way, to the harm that they experience (even when this is the result of constrained or coercive environments) the system struggles to recognise dependency and respond. When the behaviour of a young person runs contrary to what is required by the child protection system it is not enough that the young person is within age parameters for safeguarding.

However, this may be a somewhat unfair critique of the child protection system and its interpretation by professionals. It is clear that there is some recognition that young people should be protected by the state; 111 young people aged 14 and over at the time they were harmed featured across 471 serious case reviews evaluated by Ofsted. A number of serious case reviews have been published in the last two years into young people who were sexually exploited by adult men (Griffiths, 2013a; Griffiths, 2013b; Murphy, 2013; York LSCB, 2013) and government guidance states that local safeguarding children boards should have local oversight of responses to CSE (DCSF, 2009). An Ofsted inspection of Derby Local Authority commended their local multi-agency working to safeguard young people from sexual exploitation (Ofsted, 2013). The report identified that a ‘Team around the school’ model, in addition to a ‘Team around the child’, improved the involvement of education providers in multi-agency working (Ofsted, 2013:8). Their use of ‘CSE champions’ raised awareness of the issue across local services and was said to ensure ‘partner agencies were fully engaged’ (Ofsted, 2013:12).

There is no doubt that the Derby model is considered to be effective and that agencies are working together to protect young people. Yet, in terms of peer-on-peer abuse this may be limited. The tenor of the Derby report, along with the Ofsted framework, promotes ‘effective multi-agency working with **children, young people and their families**’ (Ofsted, 2013:10); i.e. multiple agencies working around families. As Derby had been responding

to CSE that involved adult abusers, a family and young person's model may have been sufficient. A serious case review by Kingston LSCB implies that it may be insufficient, however, for peer-on-peer cases (Johnson, 2013). The review found that although multiple agencies were involved with two young men, and followed all procedures correctly, they were still severely injured. The author argued that the young men were worked with individually, but that this work was not brought together even though 'it is clear that they were influenced and affected by each other's actions as well as being involved consistently with at least one other young person' (Johnson, 2013:8).

It seems that the procedures professionals are required to follow, and the frameworks through which these are inspected, may not effectively identify risk outside of the home. This limits the extent to which multi-agency work can contextualise young people's individual vulnerabilities and safeguard those affected by peer-on-peer abuse.

The ultimate dilemma for safeguarding and child protection appears to be when all of those involved, the abuser/s and the abused, are within the age remit of child protection, i.e. when they are under-18. A criminal justice joint inspection report which examined multi-agency responses to young people who sexually offend in England concluded that 'there should be absolute clarity where these children and young people 'fit' between child welfare and the criminal justice system' (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2013:25), and that all too often this clarity was missing. This gap was identified by Hackett, et al., in 2003 and persists over 10 years on. A gap that has been further problematised by the removal of HSB from the most recently revised version of statutory safeguarding guidance, *Working Together* (HM Government, 2013b), which directs how professionals should be coordinating to safeguard children and young people.

#### **4.4 Child protection and peer-on-peer abuse**

As the evidence on peer-on-peer abuse (chapter two) demonstrates, the application of a victim/perpetrator divide presents challenges for recognising the victimisation of young people who have also harmed others. In terms of child protection policy and practice, this difficulty was identified in the Ofsted evaluation of serious case reviews referred to in sub-section 4.3 (Ofsted, 2011). The report drew upon the following statement from a serious case review to evidence the friction between the protection and policing of vulnerable young people:

The dilemma relates to the way in which problematic adolescents should be approached: to what extent should they be viewed as children in need of protection, and to what extent should they be viewed as perpetrators of crime and/or a risk to others? Plainly there is a role for both views and often.... But the extent to which the overall approach is weighted towards one or other of those views must always have a rational basis. This was not always the case for this young person. To give a striking example: just at the time when the Initial Child Protection Conference was convened, the young person was made the subject of his first ASBO.

(Ofsted, 2011:20-21)

The local tensions between criminal justice and child protection practice are equally evident in national policy. While the Westminster Government committed to addressing peer-on-peer abuse as defined, all strategies that referenced the issue were managed by the Home Office and were therefore situated within criminal justice rather than child protection policy frameworks (Home Office, 2012; Home Office, 2011b). The political location of these strategies is symbolic of the overall policy shift in Government to conceptualise safeguarding issues, particularly those that affect young people outside of the home, as criminal justice responsibilities: moving them from the Department for Education to the

Home Office. Most recently the Home Office have committed to review guidance for safeguarding children from gang-related violence (HM Government, 2013a), a document that was originally the responsibility of Department for Children, Schools and Families (HM Government, 2010).

A recent government consultation on the definition of domestic abuse exemplifies the current direction of travel. In response to increasing evidence that young people's experiences of relationship abuse were under-recognised (Barter, et al., 2009; Firmin, 2011) the Home Office consulted on whether the definition of domestic abuse which applied to adult relationships should be extended to young people under the age of 18. The consultation offered the options of extending the definition to 16 and 17 year olds, extending it to young people of any age, or leaving it as only applicable to adults. The consultation was led by the Government's policing and crime department. At no point were the child protection system and the definition of significant harm publically considered as a means of recognising teenage relationship abuse (Home Office, 2011a). Following the consultation the Government extended the definition to 16 and 17 year olds (Home Office, 2012). The responses to the consultation were indicative of the tensions between policing and protecting children affected by teenage relationship abuse. Some respondents felt that the definition should be extended in order to acknowledge that some young people were in abusive relationships (Home Office, 2012:12). Whereas others argued that this acknowledgement should be realised through traditional child protection mechanisms:

We feel that the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds in the Government definition should be a sufficient action. Extending to all those under the age of 18 will most certainly blur the boundaries between childhood and adulthood and raise concerns about when such issues should be viewed as child protection/safeguarding issues.  
(North East, Local Authority/ Local Council/ Local Government)

(Home Office, 2012:16)

The two sides of this argument rest upon whether an individual's experiences, regardless of their biological age, mean that they should be viewed as adults or children. As the change in definition came into force, information was issued to local areas. However, it did not provide direction as to whether the response should use child protection procedures. Instead it asked local professionals to consider whether multi-agency risk assessment conferences (evaluated only for adults) could be used for young people (Home Office, 2013:10).

This move by the Government is demonstrative of the ways in which childhood is perceived by policy-makers in England. Having been presented with evidence that young people were experiencing forms of violence that had traditionally been perceived of as only occurring between adults, the policy response was to extend the parameters of an 'adult' definition, rather than adapt child protective frameworks to address this issue. This response indicates that if young people behave in ways that are socially constructed as 'adult' then they will be treated as such regardless of other social constructions of age. Experiences of relationship-based abuse are perceived as somewhat 'adult' and therefore take precedence over other factors in an individual's life associated with childhood such as the fact that they may still be in school, live with their parents/carers, and be dependent upon them for income and support. This reaffirms both anxieties about the theoretical and arguably false dyad between agency and dependency outlined in chapter three, and concerns about conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse that viewed young people as 'mini adults' based on their behaviour (e.g. Longo, 2003).

Criminal justice, rather than safeguarding, responses to children affected by peer-on-peer abuse are borne out, and critiqued, across the literature examined in chapter two. For example, a life narratives study with young men who had been identified as teenage relationship abuse 'perpetrators' reported that anger management was relied upon as an intervention despite evidence that these young men had historic and ongoing

experiences of victimisation (Gadd, et al., 2013:24). Such inadequacies are echoed in research into responses to serious youth violence which identify that

The problem of gangs is still most commonly seen through a criminal justice – enforcement – lens. This ... ignores the drivers of gang formation...and it assumes that the criminal justice systems, and primarily the police, are responsible for tackling the problem.

(Centre for Social Justice, 2009:105)

Researchers and inspectorates have repeatedly called for a strengthened child protection policy and child welfare response to all manifestations of peer-on-peer abuse. The study into teenage relationship abuse that led to the Home Office changing the definition of domestic abuse stated that the issue is 'a significant concern for young people's wellbeing, providing unequivocal evidence for the need to develop more effective safeguards in this area of child welfare' (Barter, et al., 2009:178). As far back as 2002 calls were made for a Government strategy to address the issue of children who display HSB (Child Protection All Party Parliamentary Group, 2014); more than ten years later one is yet to be published.

So why in the face of pressure from select committees, researchers and practitioners, does policy development continue to fall short of the safeguarding and child protection needs of young people? While arguments about young people's sense of agency and their abusive behaviours against their peers are probable answers, the literature points to one further overarching barrier – the social fields in which peer-on-peer abuse occur are not those in which the child protection system was intended to intervene.

#### **4.5 Child protection, safeguarding and social fields**

As was outlined earlier in this chapter, the child protection system is intended to protect children from harm within the home environment,



particularly that which is caused by parents/carers. Social workers are to support and/or intervene with parents/carers to safeguard a young person. Hence, legislation prioritises risk of significant harm in relation to a parent/carer's behaviour or inability to keep young people safe. Yet literature implies that peer-on-peer abuse is located in, influenced by, and reproduced through, social fields beyond the home environment (Barter, et al., 2009; Beckett, et al., 2013; Chung, 2005; Franklin, 2004; Letourneau and Borduin, 2008; Melrose, 2013; Pitts, 2013); and while those who harm their peers may have also been abused within the home, this is less consistent amongst young people than it is for pre-adolescent children who display HSB (Hackett, 2011; 2014).

Beyond children's social care, LSCBs draw in a range of agencies to safeguard young people. However, it seems that this framework provides strategic support to multi-agency working that is often conceptualised as multiple agencies working around a child and family, rather than in other social fields (Johnson, 2013). The recent OCC Inquiry into child sexual exploitation identified some promising practice where agencies in Lancashire and Derby closed down take-away shops or monitored under-18 discos that were identified as contexts that posed a risk to young people (Berelowitz, et al., 2013). These measures are promising and demonstrate an attempt by local agencies to intervene with social environments beyond the home. At present these are limited to instances where adults, rather than other young people, present that risk.

The literature explored in chapters two and three indicates that building a response to peer-on-peer abuse may mean addressing harmful attitudes and behaviours, and the rules that underpin them, across a range of social spaces outside of the home - and therefore go outside of the remit of traditional child protection practice. The theoretical framework proposed in chapter three implies that, in order to change young people's actions, their field/s of reference and the social rules that they have embodied also need to alter. Furthermore if social fields beyond the home upon which young

people are dependent, such as schools, fail to provide an environment in which the habitus can come up against rules that are discordant with, rather than reinforcing, a pursuit of hegemonic masculinity, to what extent should safeguarding practice consider these fields as posing a risk to young people within them? As peer-on-peer abuse meets the threshold for 'significant harm', multi-agency safeguarding practice may need to consider how it engages with social rules and practices beyond the home environment in order to protect young people from the phenomenon in question.

#### **4.6 Literature review – concluding remarks**

This chapter and the two that preceded it have examined current evidence on peer-on-peer abuse, and safeguarding responses to the phenomenon, through a gendered and age-specific lens of constructivist structuralism. This process has surfaced gaps in knowledge in the existing evidence base and identified a theoretical approach through which my study could advance the conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse.

Research evidences that the phenomenon in question:

- involves physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- is gendered and age-specific
- involves both individuals and groups of young people
- occurs within social contexts that may endorse or challenge the existence of that abuse, impacting upon vulnerability, consent, and culpability.

Despite this evidence, a consistent challenge across the literature is a tendency to individualise the problem of peer-on-peer abuse, associating the issue with vulnerable characteristics of children and families. Critics of this approach have called for contextualised accounts of the phenomenon which recognise young people's sense of agency, and the impact of social contexts upon both their ability to consent and the extent of their

culpability. In order to achieve this, some gaps in the evidence base need to be addressed through the provision of:

- a. an approach which considers teenage relationship abuse, peer-on-peer exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, and serious youth violence together
- b. detail on the nature of peer groups and other social spaces within which peer-on-peer abuse takes place, and the relationships between the peer group and the offence itself
- c. information on escalation towards an incident of peer-on-peer abuse, and detail about multi-agency safeguarding responses to the issue
- d. a detailed understanding of victimisation outside of the home, and its links to incidences of peer-on-peer abuse
- e. an understanding of the impact of the *interplay* between social contexts (fields) and young people's agency with reference to consent and culpability in cases of peer-on-peer abuse
- f. the theoretical and practical adaptations required to enable the development of responses to peer-on-peer abuse that are rooted in child protection and/or safeguarding procedures.

These gaps in current evidence, and a consideration of the implications for safeguarding practice, can be achieved through the application of three areas of enquiry

- Firstly, by identifying the interplay between habitus and social fields in cases of peer-on-peer abuse, this study will consider the extent to which safeguarding practice needs to address the influence of harmful contexts on individual agency.
- Secondly, in assessing the extent to which the individual habitus and different social fields accord and discord with one another, my study will identify windows of opportunity for safeguarding practice to create alternative rules, and thus other options, for young people affected by peer-on-peer abuse.

- Finally, an interrogation of the interplay between social fields, groups, and individual agency will contribute to debates about the extent to which agencies should hold young people culpable for their actions, particularly in relation to instances where they harm peers within a group or other coercive contexts.

Exploring these three thematic areas of concern will enable my study to consider the safeguarding implications of contextualising peer-on-peer abuse within the social fields that it occurs.

In order to investigate the three thematic areas outlined above, a methodological approach is required in which an in-depth assessment of interplay between social context and individual agency can be conducted. The following chapter will outline such a method and pave the way for my primary research.

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 Introduction**

While extensive evidence exists on the nature and prevalence of peer-on-peer abuse, the previous three chapters have identified significant gaps in existing knowledge in need of redress. In particular, although scholars have increasingly recognised the association of peer groups with instances of peer-on-peer abuse (Barter, et al., 2009; Chung, 2005; Letourneau and Borduin, 2008), and have critiqued individualised accounts of the phenomenon (Hackett, 2014; Melrose, 2013; Pearce, 2013), the relationship between context and individual action has yet to be sufficiently conceptualised.

In response to this, and as outlined in chapter one (sub-section 1.3), the objective of my study was to conceptualise peer-on-peer abuse in relation to the social contexts in which it occurs, paying particular attention to peer groups, and consider the implications of this approach for safeguarding practice in England. In order to meet this objective, the methodology for my study was designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the interplay between social fields and individual young people leading up to, and during, an incident of peer-on-peer abuse. This contribution to the literature is intended to provide a conceptual framework through which to review both safeguarding practice and existing larger scale studies that have established information on the prevalence of, and individual characteristics associated with, the phenomenon (chapter two).

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that I adopted for my study, how this approach was applied, and the limitations and challenges that I encountered during the process.

## **5.2 Method selection and theoretical approach**

In order to meet the objectives of my study I have used a method of in-depth case file analysis. This approach allows for a detailed account of the relationship between abusive incidents, social context and individual young people, framing what is already known about the phenomenon in the context/s in which it occurs.

As outlined in chapter two, larger studies have already identified the 'vulnerabilities', 'indicators' and 'characteristics' of the phenomenon. Case file analysis serves as a means to 'clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences (rather) than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur' (Flyvbjerg, 2006:229) and for this reason it was adopted.

The use of case studies has been critiqued on the grounds that:

- analysis of a case cannot prove anything
- case file analysis cannot produce generalisable facts or test hypotheses
- analysis of case studies are subjective and confirm the researchers bias
- case studies are made up of narratives that are too dense to be reduced.

Drawing upon the work of Campbell (1975) and Ragin (1992) amongst others, Flyvbjerg (2006) addressed all of the above to outline the benefits and purposes of case file analysis, as complimentary to, rather than at odds with, other methodological approaches. He identified that case study analysis adds depth to understanding, whereas other methodologies add breadth, thus serving as a means by which hypotheses could be examined in practice and statistics could be contextualised. While one case study may not be sufficient to develop a hypothesis, Flyvbjerg argues that it can be sufficient to challenge a hypothesis from larger scale studies should

that which is supposed not be identified following detailed examination. In applying his response to my own work I would argue that:

- My methodological approach didn't seek to prove an association between context and individuals, as that had already been established in peer-on-peer abuse literature. Rather I was attempting to learn something about these interactions and contextualise existing knowledge.
- My method was able to test the hypothesis that peer-on-peer abuse is informed by the interplay between social context and individual agency by exploring whether this occurred in specific cases of murder and rape – with reference to these incidents themselves and the behaviours that occurred during the escalatory period. It does not follow from this that should interplay be identified in any of the cases under consideration that it would occur in all instances of peer-on-peer abuse – that is not the question. Rather my study is asking, if field/agency interplay occurred in any cases what would be the implications of this for safeguarding practice.
- I was alert to potential bias in data recording and managed this by developing a template approach to uniformly capture case file evidence (outlined in sub-section 5.3). Furthermore, this study was explorative and was seeking to better understand interplay between social fields and individuals rather than prove that it occurred in any particular way.
- This approach was designed to deal with dense narrative – hence the case study approach. Should I have attempted to explore social field interaction in a way that didn't accommodate detailed analysis the objectives of my study could not have been met.

Drawing upon the version of constructivist structuralism developed in chapter three, I designed a methodology that would enable me to analyse incidents of peer-on-peer abuse in relation to the gendered and age-specific social contexts in which they occurred. This approach was built on

the theoretical position that the social fields to which peer-on-peer abuse is associated produce rules and set the parameters for individual choice (Bourdieu, 2001; Jenks, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2012b; Powell, 2008).

This position was applied to both the design of my case file template and the approach to my data analysis, both outlined in the following sub-sections. Taken together they created a methodology that examined consent and culpability in relation to context and could be used to test the sufficiency of current safeguarding practice.

### **5.3 Case file template design**

In order to uniformly log case file evidence, a template was designed upon the theoretical framework developed in chapter three (Appendix D). As such it was split into three sections that captured details of:

- the actual abusive incident and the events that led to it taking place
- the individual young people and the various social fields that they navigated
- the response of professionals and other individuals following the identification of the abusive incident.

#### ***Section A: The actual offence***

The first section of the template was intended to record information on the abusive incident. As demonstrated in chapter two, research into peer-on-peer abuse has already explored the prevalence of the phenomenon, the nature of associated offences and the behaviours of concerned individuals (Barter, 2011; Beckett, et al., 2013; Hackett, 2014). However, it provides less evidence on the context of, or pathway to, an abusive incident beyond individual histories of those implicated. By capturing information on motives for the abuse in question, the nature of the relationships of those involved and the roles that each individual played prior, during and following the abusive incident, I designed a template to address these gaps.



To record uniform and detailed information about the nature of the abusive incident, and to ensure that analysis was conducted with implications for safeguarding in mind, I drew upon child protection definitions of physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

#### Physical Abuse

*'hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child'* (Department of Health 2010:38)

#### Sexual Abuse

*'forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities'* [sexual activities is defined as] *'penetration...or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing...involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse'* (Department of Health 2010:38)

#### Emotional Abuse

*'the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effect on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate...It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber-bullying) causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children'* (Department of Health 2010:38)

For the purposes of my study these definitions were applied beyond abuse within the family and were drawn upon to identify the types of behaviours present during an abusive incident. For example, an incident of peer-on-peer abuse that resulted in a murder could involve physical and emotional abuse, or one that involved a rape could feature physical, sexual and emotional abuse and so on. They were not used to conceptualise the abusive incident in isolation of the context in which it occurred however, as

this would reduce instances of peer-on-peer abuse to behaviours abstracted from context – a critique that my study is seeking to address.

To develop this context and build knowledge on the pathways taken to peer-on-peer abuse, this section of the template was also designed to identify 'escalation'. Escalation was recorded by noting:

- events that occurred prior to the abusive incident in question
- motivations for the abusive incident to take place
- the roles of the young people involved.

Beyond escalation, evidence that the abuse, or its impact, was sustained beyond the incident itself was also captured. As a result, the 'abusive period' charted the escalation towards the abuse, the abusive incident/s, and any retaliation and threats following the incident/s. Documenting an 'abusive period' opened up avenues of investigation into the dynamics between and around the young people involved in instances of peer-on-peer abuse; an approach appropriate to the social model of culpability and consent (Pearce, 2013) proposed in previous chapters.

Porter and Alison's Scale of Influence model (Porter and Alison, 2001) and Woodham's linguistic approach (Woodhams, et al., 2012), as outlined in chapter two, was drawn upon to identify leaders in this section of the template: prior to, during and following the abusive incident. Porter and Alison's Scale was used to identify leadership through behaviour, and Woodhams' model enabled the template to recognise leadership through linguistic instruction.

Section A, therefore, was designed to record evidence of an abusive incident with reference to:

1. the types of abusive behaviours that occurred during the abusive incident
2. the abusive period: the timeline towards, during and the following the incident

3. the roles played by those involved, prior, during and following, the incident.

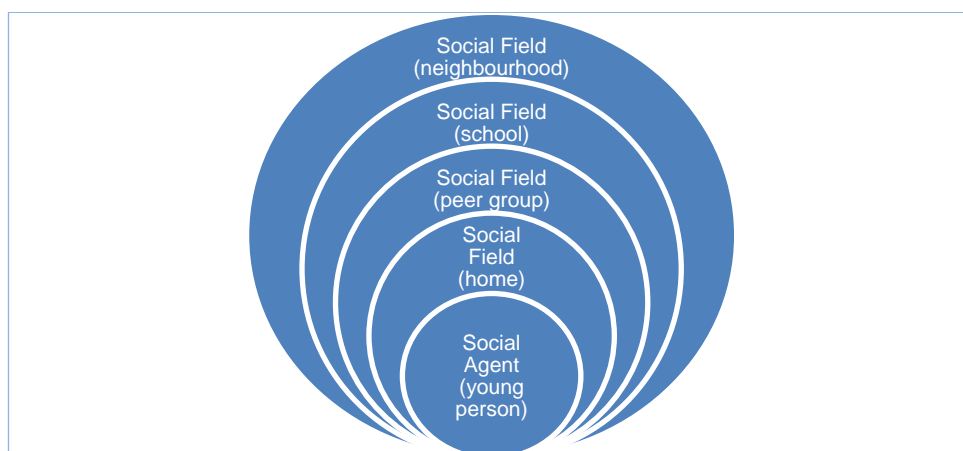
Taken in total, these three components were intended to provide an account of the abusive incident in each case.

***Section B: The individual young people and their social fields***

Drawing upon the gendered and age-specific constructivist structuralism developed in chapter three, Section B of the case template was designed to capture evidence on the nature of the social fields featured in peer-on-peer abuse cases, with reference to how they:

- related to the abusive incident and the individuals involved
- reinforced or challenged the rules underpinning the abusive incident.

Previous chapters demonstrated that the evidence base on peer-on-peer abuse, Bourdieu's social theory, applications of the concept of hegemonic masculinities and Jenks's theory of development through dependency, all suggest that the home, peer group, school and neighbourhood are potential fields of relevance to peer-on-peer abuse. Therefore, Section B was designed to capture evidence on the nature of those fields, as illustrated in Figure 3, to record information about the contexts to which each abusive incident was associated.



**Figure 3 Social field circular framework for peer-on-peer abuse**

As a result, the evidence captured in Section B of the template was intended to locate the behaviours identified in Section A within structural power hierarchies and norms at play in each social field for each young person involved in the case files. In short, Section B was designed to record an account of the social rules which young people interacted with during the abusive period.

This process was intended to assist in the identification of the interplay between environmental factors and the individual/familial vulnerabilities of the young people featured. An individual young person's experience of agency and power would be influenced by how they existed in, and interacted with, the different social fields featured in the case. A record of the social rules constructed and reproduced within fields in turn provided a means by which to understand the constraints within which individuals' sought to exercise agency – enabling a social account of consent and culpability to be developed.

In addition to contextualising abusive actions and agency, Section B of the template was designed to record examples of 'harm' or 'safety' (vulnerability or resilience) experienced by each young person, in each social field. This was intended to inform an assessment of the extent to which the social fields in the case files provided space for the generative capacity of the habitus to act against the harmful norms underpinning incidents of abuse. For each social field information was recorded in relation to identified:

- a) abusive behaviours in relation to the categories used in section A
- b) criminality
- c) gendered norms
- d) protective and supportive behaviours.

As this study is concerned with safeguarding responses to peer-on-peer abuse, the capacity of social fields to safeguard young people was also recorded in the templates. Drawing upon 'capacity to protect' within child

protection and safeguarding literature (chapter four) capacity to safeguard was defined in the template with reference to the ability of the peer group, the school, and wider neighbourhood, as well as the home, to safeguard young people from significant harm.

Section B of the template therefore was intended to produce a three-stage exploration of the contexts in which the abusive incidents occurred, by recording the evidence of the:

1. 'rules' in each social field navigated by the young people featured in the case, and the interplay between these and young people's agency
2. characteristics in each social field that either reinforced or challenged the social rules underpinning incidences of peer-on-peer abuse, and the associated space of action that this created or constrained
3. capacity of social fields to safeguard the young people within them.

This section was designed to capture of data to frame the behaviours identified in Section A which, when analysed together, would present a socio-cultural conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse.

### ***Section C: Response to the offence***

Section C was designed to record the professional response to the abusive incident as conceptualised in Sections A and B. Chapters two and four demonstrated that while some research has been conducted into interventions to varying manifestations of peer-on-peer abuse, gaps in evidence and inconsistent practice persists. Despite calls for welfare based, and contextualised, approaches to intervention, practice is primarily confined to work with individuals, and to a lesser extent families, while policy largely locates the phenomenon as a criminal justice issue (Barter, et al., 2009; Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2013). Building on this evidence, Section C of the template was designed to collect detailed information on the multi-agency professional responses to individual cases

of peer-on-peer abuse, and the extent to which they both addressed harm in social fields beyond the family and safeguarded young people.

Actions taken from the point of identification through to case closure/conviction were recorded in the templates. In addition to recording information on treatment and other services/interventions offered to the young people in the cases, the template was designed to record examples of multi-agency management, risk assessments and decision-making processes.

Finally, this section was designed to capture information on the outcomes of the professional response:

- did the intervention address any potential for ongoing harm and needs
- were strengths built upon
- were any young people left unsafe?

Recording professional responses in this manner provided data that could be analysed to assess whether/ how practice engaged with social fields beyond the home, recognised dependency and agency and took an age-specific and gendered approach.

### ***Template overview***

Taken together, these three sections were designed to capture information on the nature of the abusive incident, the contexts in which it occurred, and the ways in which it was responded to once it had been identified. By comparing sections A and B to the response outlined in section C the safeguarding implications of conceptualising peer-on-peer abuse in context could be explored. In focusing on abusive incidents and periods, as opposed to abusive or abused individuals, templates were used to capture information on all of the young people affected by an incident, and were not restricted to those conceptualised as 'victims' or 'perpetrators'.

The template structure guided the information drawn from the available material, and was designed to facilitate comparison across cases. This approach assisted the capturing of data from a range of sources within each case file. It also ensured that information was recorded in a 'case focused' rather than 'individual focused' manner as required by the theoretical approach of my study.

#### **5.4 Sampling, criteria for inclusion and selecting the case files**

Although the question posed for my study related to the safeguarding implications of a social field approach, police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) files were accessed to conduct my analysis for the following reasons.

- The literature in chapter four demonstrated that peer-on-peer abuse is primarily responded to and managed by criminal justice agencies.
- As identified in chapters two and four, I hypothesised that the police operate in the social spaces in which peer-on-peer abuse occurs whereas the domain of children's services is primarily the home.
- Alongside children's social care, and other services, criminal justice agencies have a safeguarding role (HM Government, 2013).
- Police investigations would also hold information on the pathway towards the offence, provide a perspective on motive and assist in understanding the relationships between all of those involved.
- Investigation logs would enable me to identify ways in which incidences of peer-on-peer abuse were managed, rather than rely on recall or hypothesising that may take place with interview-based methodologies.

The cases were drawn from an opportune sample. One police service was contacted as they had previously expressed an interest in learning about how to improve their response to peer-on-peer abuse. For the purposes of expediency it was decided that, given their relatively large size and

engagement in the work, cases would be randomly sampled from them as a single service, once certain selection criteria had been applied.

There were four components to the selection criteria. Firstly, as noted in chapter one, in 2013 I proposed a conceptual hypothesis of peer-on-peer abuse that located the phenomenon within the social contexts that it occurs (Firmin 2013:50). Drawing on this, the initial selection criteria for my study was cases that fell within my definition of peer-on-peer abuse, defined as: *'Physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised within young people's relationships'*. While a range of offences, such as assault and kidnap, could be used when interpreting this definition, the selection process only randomly sampled 'murder' and 'rape'. These offences fall within the parameters of the selection criteria, and while they are not representative of most peer-on-peer abuse cases, being the most harmful/serious manifestations of the phenomenon, I hypothesised that:

- some may have involved a range of abusive behaviours on the pathway to the abusive incident in question
- such cases would have required detailed investigations from which information on social contexts could be generated – as opposed to common assault investigations which may be relatively short and not fully explore the contexts in which the assault occurred.

Secondly, in addition to identifying the types of offences that would fit the behavioural aspect of the definition, both the hypothesis I proposed in 2013 and evidence on peer-on-peer abuse examined in chapter two, implied that the phenomenon is age-specific and gendered. In order to consider this proposition, individual cases were only selected if they:

- involved individuals aged 10-17 as suspects and complainants
- involved both young men and young women.

Thirdly, a decision was also taken to ensure that examples of victimisation of young men and young women, and examples of both young men and



young women victimising others, were included within the overall sample of cases.

Finally, I used a time period from 2007 – 2012 to identify cases. I hypothesised that this would enable me to track outcomes post conviction, and also establish whether effective or ineffective responses occurred over a number of years or whether they were specific to one moment in time.

From these criteria a cohort of cases were identified, as presented in Table 2, and it was from this available selection that they were randomly sampled.

**Table 2 Cases sampled for the study**

<b>Offences (January 2007 – December 2012)</b>	<b>Total no.<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>Gang-associated</b>	<b>Female Complainant 10-17 year olds</b>	<b>Female Suspect 10-17 year olds</b>	<b>Male Complainant</b>	<b>Male Suspect</b>
<b>Multiple perpetrator rape</b>	806	8.6% (n=69)	96.80% (n=780)	5.80% (n=47)	1.74% (n =14)	76.80% (n=619)
<b>Murder: teenage relationship abuse</b>	7	14.2% (n=1)	85.7% (n=6)	14.2% (n=1)	14.2% (n=1)	85.7% (n=6)
<b>Murder; serious youth violence</b>	87	39.1% (n=34)	11.5% (n=10)	20.7% (n=10)	89.6% (n=78)	95.4% (n=83)

In total nine cases were selected - three murder cases (one relationship abuse and two serious youth violence) and six multiple-perpetrator rape cases. Through supervisory discussions it was decided that, as cases covered a six year time span, six cases would provide a balanced and

<sup>12</sup> Not every case file had identified the gender of those involved, other cases had groups of suspects that were both male and female, and some cases involved the same complainant, so the complainant and suspect figures won't necessarily total the number of cases.

sufficient level of qualitative information across that time period. As murder was far less frequent than rape half the number of murder files (three) were selected. It was decided that following a review of these cases others may be selected if the dataset was insufficient to draw thematic conclusions. However the data within each file was far more detailed than had been anticipated and was sufficient for a professional doctorate study.

One murder and three rape files were gang-associated; two murders and three rape files were not. Starting with the rape files, of the 47 cases involving a female suspect the 23<sup>rd</sup> was selected (due to it being numerically in the middle of available selection). Of the remaining 805 rape cases every 160<sup>th</sup> case was selected yielding a further three gang-associated cases and two non-gang associated cases spanning the time period. Of the seven teenage relationship abuse files the third case was selected, as it numerically fell in the middle of the available cases. As this involved a female complainant and was not gang-associated the other two cases were selected from the 10 serious youth violence cases that included at least one female suspect (the fourth and eighth case), one of which was gang-associated and one that was not.

Cases were identified through random sampling of police files first, and using the unique reference number followed through to CPS files.

## **5.5 Case file analysis**

Each case file contained different levels of material/detail including an investigation log, witness statements and a range of third party material including youth offending service assessments and school reports. Tables listing the material available for each case are presented in Appendix A. The structure of the template guided the recording of the information from the files. Information was inputted into a template, one of which was produced for each of the nine cases.

Having completed all templates I designed a plan to analyse the data within them. A total of 145 young people featured across the nine selected

cases generating far more data than I had originally anticipated. For each of the 145 young people variable levels of information was available on:

- their role prior, during, and following the abusive incident
- the nature of the social fields that they navigated during the abusive period
- the response of professionals to the abusive incident in which they were involved.

The amount and nature of data gathered for each case, including the numbers of young people involved, meant that quantitative analysis could be conducted in addition to qualitative analysis.

In order to design a quantitative and qualitative analysis plan for the templates, based upon the theoretical framework outlined in chapter three, I initially conducted a process of manual analysis to identify which aspects of the template would benefit from a quantitative approach. Some data captured in the template could be counted for each case (n=9) and others could be counted for each young person (n=145). I used the template structure to design variables, analysing information on the nature of the abuse, the young people involved, the social contexts they navigated, and the response from professionals.

Three stages to the initial analysis process were designed, each with the intention of capturing information on the nature of individual behaviours, the social fields associated to the abusive incident, and the relationship between these two, in accordance with the theoretical framework for my study.

Stage one featured quantitative analysis on the nine cases. A database was created consisting of 74 variables. Analysis produced an overview and a thematic account of the nine cases beyond individual anecdote.

The stage one variables were then adapted to build a separate database in which to analyse data on the 145 young people featured across the

cases. 131 variables were created for the second database, and assisted the analysis of the:

- young people as individuals - their experiences and behaviours prior, during and following the incident in question
- roles played by young people during the abusive period
- individual characteristics of each young person
- characteristics of the social fields which were navigated by the young people
- the interaction between social fields
- the interaction between social fields and young people
- professional response to the young people and the abusive incident
- outcomes of the intervention.

For the purposes of quantitative analysis I categorised young people as complainants, suspects, witnesses or others (as they were perceived by professionals who responded to the case) and ascribed each a code according to their case file code (G1, B1 etc.) and case file number (1, 2, 3) i.e. 1G1, 1B1, 2G1, 2B1 etc.

Stage one and stage two databases were both analysed using frequencies and cross-tabs. Frequencies were run for each variable, and cross-tabs were run against young people as complainants, suspects, and witnesses in order to identify whether there were any trends within those cohorts. Additional cross-tab analysis was run on the roles that young people played during the offence, to ascertain whether any themes were present for leaders as opposed to followers and bystanders.

Analysis of thematic data on the nine cases provided an overview and analysis of the data on the 145 young people featured in the cases offered the majority of the detailed evidence. Data on the abusive incident, social fields, and response to the incident were written up in terms of: the nine

cases; all the young people; and the young people within their cohorts of complainants, suspects and witnesses.

Writing up the quantitative findings directed the qualitative analysis of my templates. Quantitative analysis was used to draft a structure for writing the findings and identifying initial themes, upon which nodes were designed in NVivo 10. I created 29 nodes to code information on the nature of the abusive period, individual young people, the social fields, and the professional response in each case file. Tree nodes were also designed for: each social field (home, peer group, school and neighbourhood) to code qualitative examples of:

- harm and resilience in each environment connected to the incident
- the individual characteristics of the young people involved
- the response of young people to the abusive incident
- the investigation process.

Tree nodes added 93 nodes, resulting in 122 nodes being used for the qualitative analysis.

Coding queries were run on the nodes in accordance with the quantitative findings, and produced qualitative evidence to support and contextualise the statistical themes.

## **5.6 Developing thematic findings and recommendations**

Informed by the pre-existing evidence base and the application of a gendered and age-specific constructivist structuralism, analysis sought to identify findings related to the:

- interplay between individual social agents and the social fields associated to incidences of peer-on-peer abuse, with particular consideration to motive and escalation
- space for alternative action within the aforementioned interplay in order to socially assess culpability and consent in each case

- ability of multi-agency safeguarding practice to engage with both social fields and social agents to address peer-on-peer abuse.

Thematic findings were generated based on the ways in which data on the abusive incident, the social fields, and the professional response related to:

- one another
- the policy and practice context in which this study has been conducted
- the existing literature
- the theoretical parameters of the study.

## **5.7 Ethics**

Given the sensitive nature of peer-on-peer abuse, the ethics of this study were under consideration from the outset. During the research design phase ethical approvals were gained from the University of Bedfordshire Research Ethics Committee. At the same time I completed the police service's process, Evidence & Performance (E&P) Protocol for External Research and Analysis, to access case files.

In order for the University of Bedfordshire to approve the study, and the police service to grant access to the case files, I needed to address a number of issues. Although this is a sensitive area of study, case file analysis does not involve the participation of young people or the generation of data that is not already held by services. To elucidate: my methodology took an original approach to analysing secondary data, and therefore was concerned with abusive incidents that had already been identified by professionals. However, the material accessed was still of a sensitive nature and therefore steps were required to ensure that no identifiable information would be published and that all data would be stored in a secure way. Original data could only be accessed on police service property. Data were then anonymised and translated into case file templates. The templates were password protected and saved in

password protected files. It was agreed that the police service would be sent a final version of the thesis at the point of submission and prior to any publication.

While the secondary data in police files was already held and known by professionals, accessing the material still required ethical consideration. The files contained interviews with young people, information on their families, schools, and peer groups, and third party material such as school reports. The police service gave consent for this material to be accessed in order to improve their responses to the issue in the future. Consent was not sought from the young people, professionals or parents/carers featured in the files. Neither the university ethics committee nor the police service thought that this was required or necessarily appropriate. Some young people were no longer alive, others were in custody, and contacting them about this historic experience, even when possible, was not necessarily ethical. Accessing this level of information has ensured that young people's voices, during the investigation process, were captured in the study, as well as the 'real-time' views of professionals involved, rather than those that would be hypothetical or informed by hindsight.

Studies of this nature, while approved by the ethical processes of the sponsor police force and the university ethics committee, raise questions regarding the Data Protection Act (DPA) that require consideration. As is the case with many serious case reviews, in order to study the proposed subject matter, through police case files, sensitive personal data was subject to analysis for reasons other than that which it was originally gathered. Specifically personal data consisting of the data subject's sexual life, their commission or alleged commission of any offence and/or any proceedings for any offence committed or alleged to have been committed by them (ICO 2015). Provisions within the DPA largely prohibit the onward sharing of such information without consent of the data subject. Given that the findings of the study were intended to improve the safeguarding in place for the young people within that police force area, and support the

service to fulfil its statutory duties to protect, in this instance it was considered to sit within Schedule 3 of the DPA - particularly, with regard to the Schedule 3's reference to the administration of justice, and in the cases of those who were murdered it was not possible to obtain consent of those involved. As outlined later in this chapter, the research process also highlighted immediate safeguarding concerns for individuals which may not have been identified in the absence of this process. However, this is far from a clear position upon which all professionals and academics are in agreement, and remains a constant point of reference and reflection for those of us concerned with the safety and welfare of children and young people, as well as other groups of people who are subject to abuse and violence.

Finally, the welfare of the researcher had to be addressed from the outset. Researchers have noted the often humiliating and sadistic nature of peer-on-peer abuse (e.g. Franklin, 2013). The content of the case files included detailed information of sexual and physical assaults on young people from the age of 11, and sometimes a lack of professional response to these assaults. Reviewing this material as a sole researcher without the benefit of a research team was a significant emotional challenge. Pro-bono clinical supervision was sourced to address this from the outset, and I also recorded thoughts/feelings as data were being captured and/or analysed.

Once approval was given by the police service and the University, the CPS also offered access to their files so that, where appropriate, cases could be tracked through the system to conviction. The ethical process and security clearance for the police service was considered sufficient from an ethical perspective. However, I also had to undertake training in the CPS information management system and sign a separate agreement with them in order to access their data. It was agreed that the CPS would also have access to the final version of the thesis at the point of submission and prior to publication.



In addition to the above processes and considerations, in taking an ethical approach throughout my study I reported any safeguarding concerns generated from the case file analysis to the University ethics committee and the police sponsor to ensure that they were followed up. The analysis did not identify any original intelligence that wasn't already held by the police service, yet on four occasions the analytical approach I adopted identified new safeguarding concerns about some of the young people featured in the investigations. For example, a murder investigation that resulted in the conviction of those responsible also surfaced information about other young people who were vulnerable to sexual exploitation. This matter had not been the focus of the investigation at the time and it was not clear how it had been followed up. This information was communicated back to the sponsor, along with the relevant investigative teams within the police service, and actions taken to explore further safeguarding options for those young people.

All ethical agreements stated that findings from the case file analysis be used to *identify themes in the nature of the abuse, the individuals involved, the context of the abuse, and the response by agencies, rather than write up any individual case study in detail*. Adopting this approach during the writing phase enabled me to protect the identities of those young people featured, their families, and the professionals involved in the case. This has been continuously considered, and discussed with supervisors and sponsors, to ensure that no young person or case are identifiable in any publications produced from my study.

## **5.8 Challenges and limitations**

My study has been designed to build on existing knowledge, and used case file analysis to develop a theoretical framework through which to conceptualise instances of peer-on-peer abuse. This is a professional doctorate study and was not intended to establish prevalence, but to offer a lens through which peer-on-peer abuse could be viewed and analysed in the future. The objective of my study could not be met through superficial

analysis on a large number of cases. Therefore while the small number of cases under consideration could be viewed as a limitation, the level of analysis conducted on each case means that the objectives of my study have been realised.

Findings have been generated from cases in one police service, potentially limiting their applicability to the remainder of England, the UK or internationally. However, Franklin's study on MPR cases in Western countries demonstrated thematic similarities across cases, regardless of the individual characteristics of the young people involved or the country of their offence (Franklin, 2013).

Research also indicates that most peer-on-peer abuse cases, (at least those that don't result in a murder) don't go through the criminal justice system and will not even be disclosed by the young people involved (Radford, et al., 2011). That eight of the nine cases under consideration resulted in convictions and that there was a professional response to all abusive incidents (including an investigation) in some ways makes these cases unique.

There are four limitations of the case files that also warrant attention. Firstly, all files provided a partially subjective account of an abusive incident, recording events based on how professionals and the young people involved perceived them to be, whereas others may have perceived the same events differently. Secondly, files were designed for the purposes of a police investigation and therefore may not have included all aspects of the professional response to each case. Thirdly, files provided accounts of a 'worst case scenario'; it is possible that similar events have occurred with other young people but were disrupted or de-escalated before anyone was murdered or raped. Finally, it could be argued that because cases are historic, the professional responses that are recorded in the case files do not reflect current practice.

In order to address all of the above limitations, the findings of this study are discussed with reference to the literary evidence outlined in previous chapters, particularly with reference to the nature of peer-on-peer abuse and current challenges in the practice of safeguarding young people. By adopting this approach, and presenting findings within a diverse and international evidence base, the conclusions of my study will have practical implications for English safeguarding systems while also raising theoretical questions for international research on abuse in young people's relationship and peer groups.

Finally, when this project commenced in 2011 'peer-on-peer abuse', as a concept, had received little public or political interest. However, over the past three years there has been increased recognition of teenage relationship abuse (Home Office, 2012), peer-on-peer exploitation (Child Protection All Party Parliamentary Group, 2014), and gang-associated young women (Centre for Social Justice, 2014). This resulted in an ever-increasing evidence base that I had to keep up with to ensure that my study remained relevant. My project has also been referenced in national and regional policy documents (MOPAC, 2013b) and in the media (Urwin, 2013) before its completion, resulting in the need to manage public and political expectations surrounding my study throughout the research process.

## **5.9 Methodology – conclusions**

Chapter five has outlined the methodological approach I have taken to conceptualise nine incidents of peer-on-peer abuse in a way that frames the phenomenon with reference to the contexts in which they occur. In doing so, my study builds upon pre-existing evidence on the nature and scale of peer-on-peer abuse, producing a detailed understanding of the interplay between social agents and social fields during selected abusive incidents and on the basis of this:

- provides a social account of consent and culpability

- identifies the modifications required for safeguarding practice to effectively protect young people from peer-on-peer abuse.

Despite the limitations and challenges outlined in this chapter, the use of secondary data and a template model assisted in the collection of uniform data that could be used to develop theoretical and practical findings about the contexts in which the incidents of peer-on-peer abuse included in this study occurred. The following chapters present the finding of my study and the safeguarding implications of this methodological approach.

## **6. Findings overview**

### **6.1 Introduction**

My findings provide a socio-cultural account of nine cases peer-on-peer abuse where a young person was raped or murdered by their peer/s, and document the ways in which professionals responded to them, in one police service area. This chapter provides an overview of those nine cases, analysed through a gendered and age-specific form of constructivist structuralism and with reference to pre-existing evidence on peer-on-peer abuse. Working from this overview, the following nine chapters explore the abusive incidents, the individuals involved, the social fields in which the abuse occurred and the professional response. In sum, they tell a contextual story about pathways to abuse, drawing attention to the vulnerabilities and strengths of environments in addition to the young people who navigate them. In taking this approach I ask the reader to consider agency, choice, culpability and consent with reference to the interplay between social fields, groups and individuals. In doing so, a story emerges of the relationship between young people's agency, the social rules that they create, reinforce, or challenge, and the response of professionals to this relationship. In adopting this approach to the examples of the phenomenon in question, a theoretical framework of peer-on-peer abuse is developed against which safeguarding responses, and other cases, can be measured.

## 6.2 Overview of cases

As outlined in chapter five, nine cases were selected for this study from murder and MPR<sup>13</sup> files, with a mix of gang and non-gang associated incidents (Table 3)

**Table 3 Cases sampled by offence type**

Case No.	Police Categorisation
1	Rape – gang associated
2	Rape – non-gang associated
3	Rape – non-gang associated
4	Rape – gang associated
5	Rape – gang associated
6	Rape – non-gang associated
7	Murder (serious youth violence) non-gang
8	Murder (domestic abuse) non-gang
9	Murder (serious youth violence) gang

Cases 1-6 are rape cases and cases 7-9 are murder cases. In all three murder cases, and in three rape cases, one offence was being investigated. In one case two rapes (of the same young person) were under investigation and in two cases three or more rapes (of the same young person) were under investigation:

- multiple perpetrator rapes took place in duos in two cases, and in 3+ groups in six cases<sup>14</sup>
- all rape cases featured acts at the abusive and violent end of Hackett's continuum of sexual behaviour (2011) (chapter two)
- drawing upon the same continuum, two murder cases also involved inappropriate or problematic sexual behaviour during the escalation to the offences under investigation.

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<sup>13</sup> From here onwards referred to as rape files

<sup>14</sup> Two cases featured both duo and 3+ group rapes

When the research definitions of MPR, HSB, CSE, serious youth violence, and teenage relationship abuse (chapter two) are applied to the cases, overlapping categorisations are required as outlined in Table 4:

**Table 4 Policy categorisation of sampled cases**

<b>Sub-category of abuse</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Serious youth violence	1
MPR, HSB, CSE and serious youth violence	6
Domestic violence, HSB and serious youth violence	1
CSE, HSB, domestic violence, and serious youth violence	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>

This complexity is exemplified in Figure 4, which illustrates the peer group associated with murder Case 8. Analysis demonstrated that although it had been conceptualised as a 1:1 teenage relationship homicide by professionals and was ultimately committed by an individual, problematic sexual behaviours, sexual exploitation and youth violence featured in the build up to the murder itself, drawing in more young people than the specific ‘suspect’ and ‘complainant’.

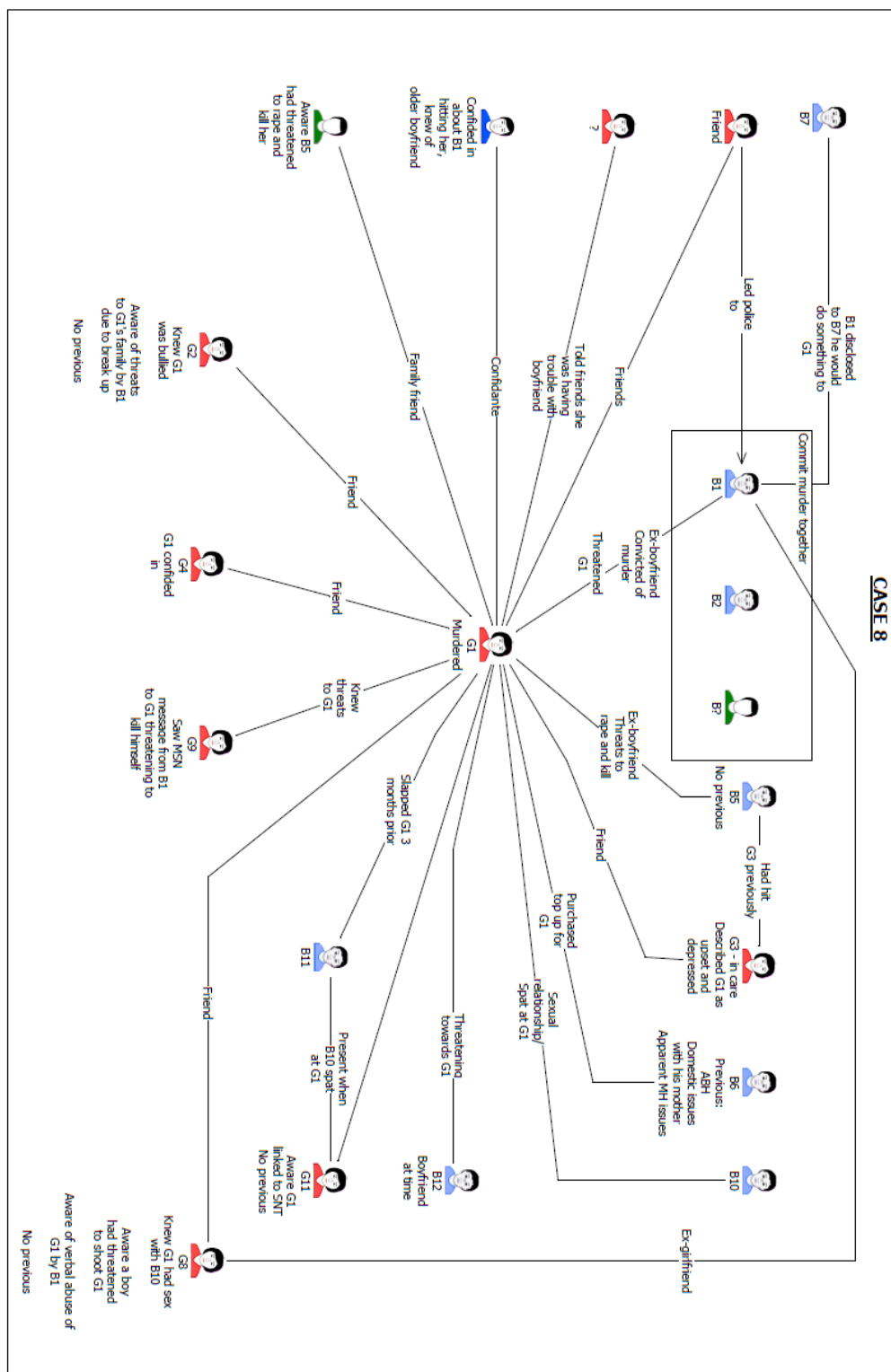


Figure 4 Peer group association to intimate relationship murder



### 6.3 Number of young people involved

Contextual analysis of the nine cases identified young people who were associated to the abusive incident through their peer group/s, as well as those who were directly implicated in the abusive incident (a relationship to be explored in chapter ten). 145 young people<sup>15</sup> were identified across the nine cases, as outlined in Table 5, using their police categorisation of complainant, suspect, witness and other, at the time of the incidents under investigation. Each of these categorisations will be explored in detail in the following chapter. In order to maintain the anonymity of cases it is not possible to reflect issues such as gender or age in Table 5, however these will be discussed thematically in later chapters.

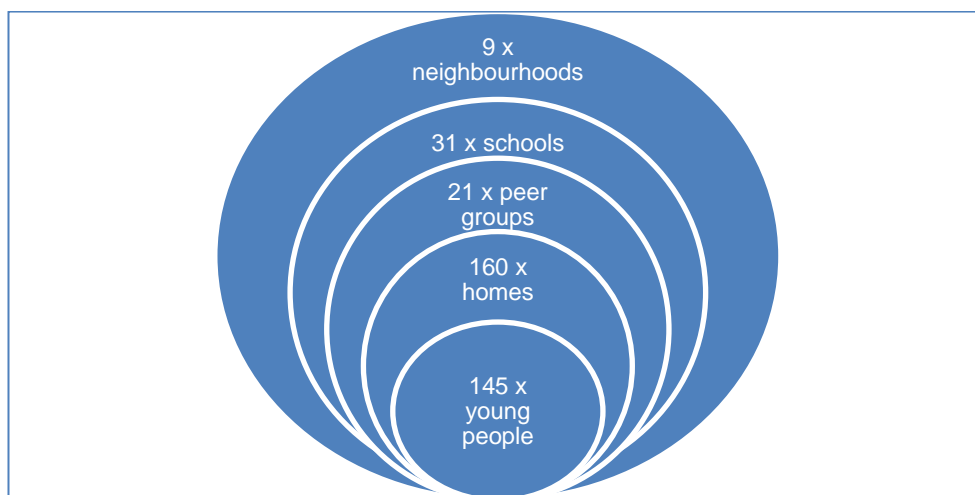
**Table 5 Categorisation of young people by case type and number**

Case No	Police Category	Complainant	Suspect	Witness	Other	Total
1	Rape (gang)	1	9	4	3	17
2	Rape (non-gang)	1	3	0	1	5
3	Rape (non-gang)	1	4	16	1	22
4	Rape (gang)	1	16	5	0	22
5	Rape (gang)	1	9	0	0	10
6	Rape (gang)	1	6	6	2	15
7	Murder (non-gang)	1	20	0	1	22
8	Murder (non-gang)	4	2	10	4	20
9	Murder (gang)	1	7	4	0	12

<sup>15</sup> 139 aged 11-17 and 6 turned 18 during the abusive period / investigation

## 6.4 Social fields

As outlined in chapters three and five, the social fields recorded in each case file were examined as part of my study. This approach contextualised the abusive incidents and enabled an exploration of the interplay between fields and individual action, which, in turn, developed a social understanding of both consent and culpability. The contexts most frequently associated to instances of peer-on-peer abuse are families, peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods (Firmin 2013a, Frosh, et al. 2002, Messerschmidt 2012b), so these were the social fields identified across the nine case files, as illustrated in Figure 5:



**Figure 5 Social fields circular framework as applied to the case files**

Analysis identified positive/supportive/resilient characteristics in each of these social fields, in addition to evidence of harm/vulnerability, prior, during, and following, the incident under investigation.

## 6.5 Disclosure and identification

All murder cases were identified by the public and police immediately after a young person had been killed. In cases of rape: on three occasions

young people made a disclosure immediately after the offence; in one case professionals responded to the warning signs shown by a young person over a year after the offence; in another a peer made a disclosure; and in the final case a young person disclosed sexual activity to a sexual health service but had not identified that this was a disclosure about sexual abuse.

## **6.6 Outcomes**

In eight cases young people were charged with the offence in question and the remainder resulted in a 'no further action' decision by the CPS. In half of those eight cases all who were charged were also convicted, and in the other half only some were convicted. All young people who were convicted were also incarcerated.

In four cases young people were relocated during or following the investigation. Following the closure of the investigations harm continued to be experienced by young people in six out of the nine cases in question. Serious case reviews were not undertaken on any of the cases under analysis.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the documented evidence contained in the nine files with reference to the individual young people, social fields, and professional responses. It demonstrates that all cases of abuse were identified by professionals and that action was taken to address the abusive behaviours. All cases involved abusive and violent behaviours, included a large number of young people, and featured the social sites of the home, peer group, school and neighbourhood. The following seven chapters provide detailed analysis of this data, in order to provide a socio-cultural conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse against which the sufficiency of safeguarding responses can be assessed.

## **7. Findings: the abusive incidents**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Chapter six illustrated that six of the nine cases resulted in an offence of rape and three resulted in an offence of murder. Yet labelling the abusive incidents in this way does not sufficiently capture their nature. As hypothesised at the point of case file selection, while ‘rape’ or ‘murder’ were the incidents under investigation in the case files, abusive incidents involve a range of behaviours, motives, and escalations that need to be explored to illustrate what occurred and the pathway to that offence. Therefore, this chapter outlines the nature of the abusive incidents within the nine files with reference to:

- the abusive behaviours involved
- the timeline and escalation towards the abusive incident
- attempts to disrupt escalation
- consent and culpability
- motives.

In later chapters, the nature of the abusive incidents illustrated in this chapter will be contextualised with reference to the social fields in which the abuse occurred, the young people involved, and thus the interplay between agency/field.

## 7.2 The abusive behaviours

Emotional abuse was identified in all nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse, and in eight physical, and sexual, abuse<sup>16</sup> also occurred (Table 6):

**Table 6 Types of abuse by case file**

Case No.	Police Category	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse
1	Rape – gang associated	X	X	X
2	Rape – non-gang associated	X	X	X
3	Rape – non-gang associated	X	X	X
4	Rape – gang associated	X	X	X
5	Rape – gang associated	X	X	X
6	Rape – non-gang associated		X	X
7	Murder (serious youth violence) non-gang	X		X
8	Murder (domestic abuse) non-gang	X	X	X
9	Murder (serious youth violence) gang	X	X	X

In eight out of the nine cases these abusive behaviours were facilitated by technology, via the use of phones and social media.

In some incidences the abuse was recorded as being chaotic in nature:

Damage to liver and loss of blood caused the death, total body bruised, 7 blunt blow injuries and fractured wrist. The attack seems to have been frenzied with 9B2<sup>17</sup> also receiving a blow to the head by 9B3 accidentally. (Case Nine)

The boys moved 1G1 to three different public spaces ... to orally rape her...at times it was a frantic assault with statements such as

<sup>16</sup> Financial abuse was not recorded at this point of the analysis, although it is included in the definition upon which this study was based. Financial coercion was more of a characteristic that enabled physical, sexual, and emotional, abuse, rather than being a distinct form of abuse in its own right. This may be due to the limited financial capacity of young people. A further discussion of financial abuse can be found in Chapter 10, sub-section 10.5.

<sup>17</sup> Individual young people are coded in the case quote with reference to their case file number (1-9), their gender (Girl - G or B - Boy), and the number they are given in the file (1-25)

‘It’s my turn’ and descriptions of the boys jeering while 1G1 was being assaulted. (Case One)

Whereas in other cases assaults were recorded as being calm, or even casual, in nature:

4B1 suggested that they have penetrative sexual intercourse. When she said that she didn’t want to get dirty on the floor, the boys told 4G1 to turn around and bend over and each of them anally raped her. When they were finished the boys told 4G1 that she could go home. When in her police interview she was asked why they stopped 4G1 stated that she thinks that the ‘boys got bored’. (Case Four)

Of the eight cases that involved sexual abuse (six rape and two murder cases), the type of sexual acts used was as follows (Table 7):

**Table 7 Types of penetrative assault used during instances of sexual abuse**

Type of penetrative assault	Number of Cases
oral and anal	2
oral and vaginal	2
anal and vaginal	1
oral, anal and vaginal	1
Unknown	2
Total	8

Emotional abuse featured in all nine cases, making it the most consistent type of abuse identified. Its usage was recorded in a range of ways, including creating a sense of fear, manipulation and coercion:

1B2 and 1B1 threatened to stab or beat up 1G1 if she did not comply with the requests for sexual activity. (Case 1)

One of the boys (4B8) stated that if she didn't do what he was asking his girlfriend would beat up 4G1. The two boys anally raped 4G1 and she was told to 'hack the pain'. (Case 4)

8B1 used to call 8G1 a 'whore' and a 'bitch'. Whenever they broke up he would threaten to both kill himself and to tell her family that she had been seeing boys. (Case 8)

Abusive incidents were recorded as involving humiliation, and young people were taunted and blamed for what was happening to them:

1B4 and 1B6...blamed 1G1 for what was happening to her during the assault: 'You loved it you dirty slag', 'sket', 'slag'. (Case 1)

3G14 then stated that 3G1 had to kiss her shoe and 3G1 did this. 3G14 laughed and 3G1 said that she then laughed too as she 'couldn't stand there like a pratt'. ...3G14 then took photos of vaginal intercourse and 3G3 was still laughing saying 'Are you enjoying that'. (Case 3)

Findings related to those who occupied the roles of complainant and suspect in the selected cases imply that these behaviours were largely gendered. In all six rape cases young women were abused, and in five of these cases lead suspects were young men. The two young men who were murdered were killed on the street by groups of predominantly male peers, whereas the young woman who was murdered was killed by her male ex-partner. While some of this is the result of sampling, the contexts in which these patterns emerge are most important for understanding the gendered dynamic of the behaviours. In the two extracts above for example, both young men and young women employed gendered stereotypes to humiliate and blame young women who are abused, utilising and reinforcing hegemonically masculine gender relations. In

murder cases, as will be explored in later chapters, it is the relations between young men, as well as between young men and young women, that characterise the murders of young men as well as young women, reinforcing hierarchies between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities.

The nature of the incidents in question, and many of the behaviours that led towards them during escalatory periods, would be identified as violent (based on Hackett's continuum of sexual behaviour 2011), and yet much of it happened in public and open spaces (in keeping with findings from Beckett and Gerhold, 2003; Lambine, 2013; Finkelhor, et al., 2009; and Porter and Alison, 2006). Only one of the nine cases occurred exclusively within a private property. In five cases all of the recorded abuse occurred outdoors, and in the remaining cases abuse took place both indoors and outside. This finding distinguishes these incidents from other forms of relationship-based abuse, such as domestic abuse, which have been considered 'private', and locates the behaviours in the age-specific environments of adolescence explored in chapter three: there is little that is private about these accounts of peer-on-peer abuse. Even the case that took place indoors involved three young men sexually assaulting a young woman in front of one another, making it private to the group but not to individuals.

Having outlined the nature of the abusive behaviours featured in the case files it is important to consider the journey taken towards their occurrence.

### **7.3 Timeline and escalation**

The abusive behaviour outlined in sub-section 7.2 did not occur spontaneously. Timelines recorded in the nine case files illustrated a pathway towards abusive behaviours – the escalation period. Escalation happened:

- between 13 and 24 hours in two cases



- over a two week period in one case
- over an extensive period in six cases (involving multiple incidents).

Such differential escalation is exemplified in three examples below (some points have been removed to preserve anonymity):

Case 2 (rape)

- A young woman received a call from a young man that she met online asking if she wanted to meet up that day. The young woman agreed
- After school the young woman travelled to a park to meet the young man and walked with him to a private residence where he knocked on the door and was let in by another young man
- In the private residence three young men raped and physically assaulted the young woman
- As the young woman was late home her sister phoned the police to report her sister as missing
- The young woman was allowed to leave once the assault is over
- The young woman travelled home immediately and disclosed to her mother

Case 8 (murder)

- A young woman broke up her boyfriend and entered into another relationship
- Her friends raised concerns about her relationships but she stated that she needed a boyfriend in the local gang to protect her
- Over a two week period the young woman commented to friends that her boyfriend was controlling and monitoring her movements, she broke up with him
- In the days following the break up the young man made threats to the young woman, phoned her home, and told some of his friends that he would harm her
- The young woman disclosed her concerns to her peers and a local trusted adult but said that she could not tell her family
- Later that evening she was murdered by her ex-boyfriend

Case 6 (rape)

- A young woman was approached by a young man in school who asked her to engage in sexual activity with him, she said no
- The young man continued to approach the young woman over a six month period when he was in the lunch queue and corridors
- After two weeks the young woman confided in her friend who told her to just ignore him and he would give up as he had done with other young women
- Over the same six month period the young man sexually and physically assaulted other young women within school and witnessed the stabbing of a friend
- A number of weeks later the young man approached the young woman in the lunch queue and said 'come'. She did so and was sexually assaulted (Incident 1)
- After the assault other young men in the school shouted that she was a 'sket'
- The young man continued to ask the young woman for sex and she said no
- Approximately six months later the young man came to her house with 6-7 other young men who knocked on her door for sex (Incident 2)

As these examples illustrate, the escalation period engaged peer groups who were increasingly exposed to the public abuse of their friends:

4G1 was: 'Beaten up for refusing to perform a sex act by 4B1, and punched and threatened with a brick by 4B2 and 4B10; hit and slapped by three boys for refusing to perform an oral sex act and then hit over the head with a bottle caused bleeding to her head ...; slapped around the face by two boys at a bus stop; punched in the face; hit over the head by a sister of one of the boys'. (Case 4)

(8G1 is part of an) exploitative peer group – other boys named as physically assaulting 8G1, some of whom were referred to as boyfriends: 8B11– slapped 8G1 in a fast food restaurant 3 months before the murder; 8B10 spat at 8G1, this has been confirmed by multiple friends; 8G11 states being present at the scene when 8B10 said to 8G1 'say sorry' when he spat at her, he also blocked her path another time and said 'say sorry'...8G1 had told 8G8 that the year before a boy had threatened to shoot her. Friends say that she used to get trouble from boys when she didn't talk to them or

wouldn't go out with them. She was also called from private numbers on multiple occasions and on two occasions asked her friends to 'hide' her'. (Case 8)

Such sustained exposure to abusive behaviours arguably created hegemonically masculine conditions in which young people perceived abuse as inevitable, and symbolic violence was enacted, as proposed in chapter three – an issue to be returned to in later chapters.

In all three murder cases the escalation involved threats to kill and murder-related discourse amongst peers, for example:

7B4 stated that 'madness' was going to happen ... and told an individual to bring whatever he could... Stated he knew what was going to happen the following day – that it was 'proper serious' and that someone was 'gonna get slumped'. (Case 7)

Leading up to the assault, 9B1 was contacted by 9B2 and threatened over the phone for having had sex with 9G1. 9B1 made attempts to contact 9B2 in the weeks leading up to the murder and contact escalated/peaked at different points indicating concern on the behalf of 9B1. 9B1 reports to friends (9B8 and 9B9) that he has been threatened by 9B2 and that he might get killed. (Case 9)

Threats were less uniformly recorded in rape files. Instead escalation appeared to involve: the use of physical abuse in four cases; repeated requests for sexual contact in three cases; the creation of a threatening and violent, vis-à-vis coercive, environment in four cases; and in three cases the abusive incidents took place within the context of school bullying as exemplified below:

All of the boys in the (school) group would try to touch her all over her body, both over and under her clothing. 4B2 would always ask her to perform oral sex acts on him and try to unbutton her trousers and lift up her top. Other boys tried to touch her bottom and breasts

over her clothing and would beat her up when she refused to engage in sexual activity with them. (Case 4)

This sub-section has illustrated public and threatening periods of escalation in which coercive contexts were created and the abusive incidents later occurred. During this period, abusive gender relations between young men, and between young men and young women, were established and reinforced through peer group relations and public (as opposed to discursive) displays of harm. The behaviours recorded in this section could give the impression that the embodiment of hegemonically masculine and abusive social rules was universal amongst the young people involved in the cases. However, files also contain evidence of young people who, like the boys in Light's study of an Australian rugby team (2007), sought to challenge these norms: this chapter will now consider these examples.

#### **7.4 Attempts to disrupt escalation**

In six of the nine cases some young people, who were bystanders (or recorded as witnesses in the files), attempted to intervene and disrupt abuse within coercive, and arguably permissibly abusive, contexts. Accounts of 'positive' bystanders, predominantly recorded in witness statements, imply that some young people were aware of the increasing likelihood of significant harm occurring and differentially attempted to intervene and disrupt the escalation process:

6G1 spoke to her friend 6B2 about what was happening. He told her to keep saying no to 6B1 and eventually he would stop. 6G1 had seen other children saying no to 6B1 and this worked so she agreed to take this approach. (Case 6)

B5 saw (4G1) and grabbed her by the head and pulled her up. At this point a bus pulled up and 4G1 ran onto the bus and saw some of her friends. The boys followed 4G1 onto the bus and 4B5 started slapping 4G1. Her friend (4G4) tried to stop them but 4B1 punched

4G4 in the head to make her stop. Another of the girls, who was a cousin of 4B1(c), told 4B1 to stop. (Case 4)

I told her to get out but she was scared'. (Case 8)

In accordance with the theoretical position espoused in chapter three, bystander attempts at disruption implied that social rules within peer groups, schools, and neighbourhoods, were not so powerful as to completely control the behaviours of all the young people within them. In these instances young people resisted and challenged the coercive rules of the social field/s in which they existed.

However, it is important to note that although individual young people attempted to disrupt their peers' embodiment of harmful norms, they did so within the social field that promoted the rules that they were challenging. As evidenced by the literature in chapters 2 and 3, the age-specific pull of the peer group, and the need to belong to it, meant that young people did not engage in fields external to the peer group in order to effectively disrupt escalation. Rather they sought to change the rules of a field while remaining part of it, re-invoking the critique by Dreyfus and Rabinow (1995) that queried whether social agents can step out of social fields in which they are striving to gain status. This raises questions about what enabled the young people, in the above examples, to choose a different behaviour – questions that will be discussed with reference to the nature of the peer group social field in chapter ten.

## **7.5 Motives**

According to file evidence, the period of escalation was also a time during which motives were established and altered. Peer groups featured in all nine files. Yet the individuals within these groups displayed behaviours which implied they did not always have a shared motive. To elucidate: in both rape and murder cases there were young people who were motivated by their relationship with the complainant, such as: the complainant ended a relationship (Case 8) or the complainant 'disrespected' or 'slighted' one

of the suspects (Cases 1, 3, 7, 9). Whereas other young people in the same cases were motivated to partake in the offence as they were part of the group and loyal to the lead suspect/s (who held the primary motive), as exemplified below:

Murder case:

Motive 1 (with reference to B2 – suspect who instigated the murder): Revenge of B2 for B1 having entered into a relationship with G1

Motive 2 (with reference to G1 – suspect who enabled the murder): Enabled G1 to get back together with B2 by demonstrating loyalty

Motive 3 (with reference to B3): B1 had been in a fight with B3. B3 had lost a tooth in the fight when B1 punched him. This attack was revenge for B3

Motive 4 (with reference to the remaining group, most of whom who chased the complainant, and watched rather than participated in the violence): participated as part of that peer group, an identified gang who demonstrated loyalty to B2

The available data evidences that motivations were not always shared by all featured young people. Table 8 lists all of the ‘reasons for individual engagement or non-intervention (of bystanders)’ recorded in each case file, each of which was not shared by the group. Rather, in each of the nine cases the leader/s had a primary motive which others in the group either did or did not share. Others were motivated to engage in the abusive incident for differential reasons, many of which related to the context in which the abuse occurred.

**Table 8 Explicitly recorded motives for involvement, or non-intervention, in each case**

<b>Case ID</b>	<b>Primary Reason (held by leader/s)</b>	<b>Secondary Reason</b>	<b>Additional Reason</b>
<b>1 Rape</b>	Punishment for being 'disrespectful'	For the complainant to retrieve her phone	Because sex was available everyone was doing it
<b>2 Rape</b>	Unknown	Because complainant had 'done it for one' of the group before	Because a suspect's property was missing and the complainant was blamed
<b>3 Rape</b>	Punishment for being disrespectful	Unknown	For the complainant to retrieve her property
<b>4 Rape</b>	Unknown	Because complainant had 'done it for one' of the group before	Because the complainant was part of the 'friendship group'
<b>5 Rape</b>	Unknown	In order for the complainant to retrieve her stolen property	Because the complainant 'did it for one' of the group already
<b>6 Rape</b>	Unknown	Because complainant had 'done it for one' of the group before	N/A
<b>7 Murder</b>	Territorial dispute	Reaction to a previous fight	Loyalty to group
<b>8 Murder</b>	Punishment for ending the relationship	Because complainant had 'done it for one' of the group before	Punishment for being gang-affiliated through a relationship
<b>9 Murder</b>	Punishment for being disrespectful	Reaction to a previous fight	To avoid physical violence and maintain status

Some of these recorded motivations are arguably superficial – the implied complexity of motive establishment and shifting motivations warrant recognition. As noted in chapter three, critics of Bourdieu (i.e. Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1995; Reay, 2004) have argued that there is not a universal goal of human action - the multiple reasons recorded in Table 8 arguably support that argument to some extent. Unless all recorded reasons were

superficial motivations towards the achievement of the universal motor, that of status within the social field.

The superficiality of the recorded motives however does require further examination: why would young men sexually assault a young woman just because they were told that sex was available and everyone was doing it – as outlined in Case 1? Recorded levels of detachment make it difficult to always ascertain motives. Across the six rape cases 46 suspects and 16 bystanders demonstrated signs of detachment from what was happening. For example in Case 2 the suspects started playing on a computer game part-way through the abusive incident while the complainant ‘sat on the bed and cried’. In a further case two bystanders who witnessed a rape stated that ‘well she always has boyfriends’. In another case a suspect was recorded as walking away from the scene ‘laughing and grinning stating that a girl just got raped’. The challenge this presents for evidencing motive is illustrated by the following example:

5G1 met boys on the bus, with two female friends. Everyone goes to the park. Two boys ask 5G1 to follow them into the bushes where she is anally raped. At this point the victim says that she does not want to have sex with the boys and is forced onto the floor. (5G1) stopped protesting when (she) realised the boys were going to do it anyway – first 5B1 and then 5B2 anally raped 5G1. 5G1 gave 5B1 her phone number afterwards even though she didn’t want to. After offence 5B1 asked if she was okay. (Case 5)

Pre-existing literature suggests that, in addition to those that were documented, there will have been gendered and age-specific implicit motives that informed the choices made by young people in the files related to: power and control (for example Holland et al., 1998<sup>18</sup>; Kelly, 2013), pursuits of hegemonic masculinity (for example Franklin, 2004),

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<sup>18</sup> Holland et al., (1998) have linked emotional detachment directly to a pursuit of control amongst young men and attempts to maintain masculine domination within intimate relationships – to show emotion create a vulnerability that would threaten to undermine hegemonic masculinity



and a need to belong to the peer group (Warr 2002), in addition to experiences of previous victimisation (for example Hackett, 2011; Pitts, 2008). However, none of this is explicitly recorded as a motive within the investigating documents and may only be evidenced through the contextualised excavation of the case file evidence offered in later chapters. This is particularly true of rape cases, where motive is far less explicit in the testimony of the young people in the case, or in the professional responses, but may be implied in the interplay between social agents and the fields in which the abuse occurred. Given the probable superficiality of the reasons recorded in Table 8, 'motivation' will be discussed in later chapters, with reference those who disrupted, as well as those who engaged in, abuse.

The above findings indicate that, as suggested in chapter two, considering such abusive behaviours, abstracted from social context, provides supposition but little in the way of evidence about the motives held by some of the suspects in the files. An exploration of both, the histories of suspects and the nature of the social fields in which abuse occurred (chapters eight and nine-to-twelve respectively) will illuminate an understanding of motivation that extends beyond that which was formally recorded as a motive in case files.

## **7.6 Accounts of consent and culpability**

The potential for differential motives, the nature of the escalation period and the behaviour during the abusive incidents, provides an insight into the character of consent and culpability in the nine cases under analysis.

A lack of consent is recorded in all rape files, communicated by complainants as having limited, or no, choice:

'I felt really intimidated....I then thought I had no choice but to go through with it .... 3G14 came in and said "do it or you are going to get banged". I felt I had no choice as I didn't want to get hurt.' (Case 3, complainant account)

‘cos I know what these boys are like if they don’t get what they want they’ll beat you up or get girls to beat you up and they’ll switch for no apparent reason...if you say no they consider it as being rude and they don’t like getting talked to like that, and if you’re rude to them then they’ll beat you up and I’ve seen how they beat up people, how everyone’s scared of them....I said no for something very little I’ve been beaten up and bottled and I realised if I did say no what would happen...I was pressurised and scared, I knew deep down I didn’t want it cos I was still young but I didn’t have a choice.’ (Case 4, complainant account)

In these examples, the parameters of choice, and therefore consent, were framed with reference to physical violence: if the ‘sexual activity’ didn’t take place then they would have experienced a physical assault, compromising their capacity to choose freely.

Beyond the threat of physical violence, exploitative exchanges were fashioned by suspects to create (false) impressions of ‘a choice’ and therefore of consent:

They took her phone and said that she would only get it back if she performed an oral sex act on them. (Case 1)

2B2 stated that 2G1 could go home if she gave him oral sex. 2G1 gave 2B2 oral sex and 2B1 and 2B3 filmed this on their mobile phone. (Case 2)

Some suspects referenced exchange, or a lack of physical fight-back, as evidence that a complainant had consented as exemplified in this following suspect account:

3G3 told 3G1 to do an oral sex act on 3B6 and 3G1 said okay so long as she could have her cigarettes back afterwards. 3G1... did the oral sex act...there was no force or threats made – everyone was laughing. (Case 3, suspect account)

In addition to examples of exploitative exchanges, control tactics were identified across all nine cases, creating, sustaining and disrupting, gendered and age-specific power hierarchies between the 145 young people featured. In addition to threats to kill, noted in section 7.3, threats to hurt complainants' families featured in three cases. Some control tactics were less explicit and in eight cases were linked to the complainants' knowledge/experience of violence amongst peers that could be used against them if they did not comply.

Control tactics were not exclusively experienced by complainants. Experiences of abuse also influenced suspects' sense of power and, arguably, the extent to which they were all *equally* culpable for their abusive behaviours. For example, in Case 1 a suspect said that he couldn't assist the complainant as he was 'with his boys now', and in Case 9 a suspect stated that 'either he gets beats or I get beats'. In Case 3, two suspects were found not guilty at trial as they acted as bystanders who did not intervene in the case. There was sufficient evidence to suggest that they were afraid of the lead suspect and felt unable to intervene.

A sense of loyalty to peers also appeared to contribute to young people's engagement in abusive behaviour in three cases, even though no explicit control tactic was evidenced in the files. The power of individual suspects may have been different to the power of the peer group/s of which they were a part. This created scenarios where some suspects were simultaneously powerful in relation to the complainant and powerless in relation to the group; reinforcing the challenge of the victim/perpetrator dichotomy presented in the literature review – a matter to be picked up in a more detailed exploration of peer group dynamics in chapter ten.

Despite evidence that their interaction with coercive environments and abusive behaviours compromised both the consent and culpability of some, evidence suggests that harmful social rules were not universally embodied amongst all young people in the case files. For example, in Case 1 a suspect and a bystander interpreted the behaviour of one

complainant in different ways. One male suspect responded to a complainant crying by calling them 'fake tears' whereas a male witness asked her why she was upset, identified that she was not consenting, and intervened. There was more than one notion of consent in operation during this case, and signs of non-consent were recognised. This echoes the finding of Powell (2010) that some young people recognise non-verbal behaviour as indicating a lack of consent in addition to the language of 'no', whereas others insist that if someone doesn't say 'no' then they have consented. In keeping with the evidence on positive bystanders in subsection 7.4, differential accounts of consent amongst young people in the cases demonstrated the capacity of individuals to act contrary to, and beyond the perceived constraints of, featured social fields.

All examples imply a spectrum of controlling behaviours in nine cases that either drew upon gendered and/or age-specific inequalities, or created/reinforced them, as a means of gaining control over complainants, bystanders and sometimes other suspects. Yet, reference to these individual behaviours, abstracted from the social fields in which they occurred, risks simplifying young people's experiences of power, control, and sense of self. As with the challenge for establishing motive, while implied, the account provided thus far is unable to fully explore the gendered and age-specific dynamics of the incidents in question. Power imbalances between those involved in the cases will be informed by the hierarchies within their fields of operation, and the gendered and age-specific norms of those environments, in addition to each young person's individual characteristics and biographies.

Therefore, these behaviours will be returned to once the nature of the social fields in which the abuse occurred has been presented. Such an approach will enable this thesis to fully explore power, and therefore consent and culpability, with reference to the interplay between field and agent.

## **7.7 Summary findings: the abusive incident**

This chapter has presented evidence on the nature of the abusive incidents documented within nine rape or murder files, finding that:

1. Incidents featured physical, sexual and emotional abuse, often involved humiliation and degradation, and often occurred outdoors.
2. Incidents occurred following a period of escalation ranging between 13 hours and in excess of six weeks.
3. During the escalatory period, gendered and age-specific social rules in relation to consent, group loyalty, and the use of violence were established, within peer groups, in addition to the motive/s for the abusive incidents.
4. Young people were recorded as being motivated to engage in, or fail to intervene with, abusive incidents for multiple, and not universal, reasons. Suggestions of detachment and the possibility of implicit and potentially gendered and age-specific motivations mean that, at this stage, some behaviours appear 'motiveless'.
5. Explicit and implicit control tactics were experienced by complainants, suspects and witnesses, creating and reinforcing gendered and age-specific hierarchies of control between young people at the point of the abusive incident, and during the escalation period.
6. Not all young people conformed to the harmful norms to which they were exposed and demonstrated this when they attempted to disrupt escalation or differentially conceptualise consent.

The data presented in this chapter evidences the nature of, motivation for, and escalation towards, the violent and abusive behaviours used by young people against others in nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse. It implies that much of this was gendered and age-specific, informed by the dynamics of peer groups associated to the incidents in question. Yet in the absence of a contextualised account these implications cannot be explored and many questions remain. We are still left asking – why are some young people

motivated to do what they do, and to what extent do variable motives and bystander interventions contest/support the notion that young people in groups are equally culpable for their actions? The predominant direction of abuse (towards young women and from young men) implies a gendered dynamic to the behaviours, and the presence of peer-groups suggests age-specific points of influence. However, such implications are yet to be substantiated and are not consistent: young women appear as suspects; two of the three murders involve the killing of a young man; and some young people act against the norms of their peer groups. In accordance with the evidence from the literature, the following chapters will explore the individual biographies of those involved and the contexts in which the abuse occurred to excavate that which has thus far been implied, providing a socio-cultural account of peer-on-peer abuse.

## 8. Findings: the individual young people involved

### 8.1 Introduction

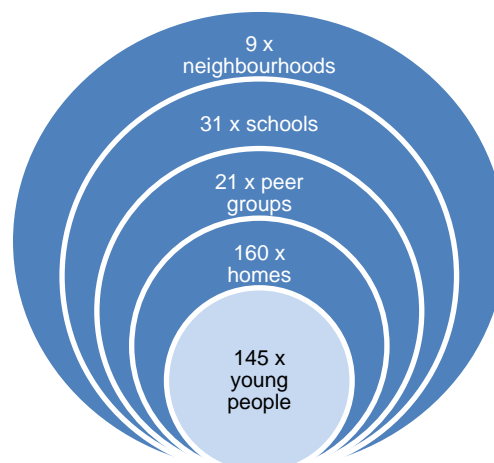
A constructivist structuralist examination of the data presented in chapter seven identified three key themes. Firstly, that abusive incidents are more than the behaviours of individual young people; they involve periods of escalation, the establishment of motive, and the undermining of consent. Secondly, that although all nine cases involve some group association, on occasion young people individually acted or conceived of what was happening in ways that differed from their peers. This is particularly true of young people who sought to disrupt periods of escalation. Thirdly, that the abusive behaviours appear to be gendered and age-specific yet, as presented, cannot be fully understood when abstracted from the biographies of the young people involved and the social contexts in which the abuse occurred.

In a bid to address these gaps, this chapter will present the demographics, vulnerabilities, victimisation and offending histories of the young people featured in the nine cases, prior to an exploration of the social fields they were navigating.

### 8.2 An overview

145 young people featured across the nine cases, and in this thesis will be referred to as:

- Complainants (including those young people who were murdered)



- Suspects: individuals suspected of carrying about the abuse under investigation
- Witnesses
- Others: young people who were interviewed or connected to the case but did not directly witness the abuse – such as a cousin of one of the complainants who gave a statement and was threatened as a result.

These categories refer to the roles ascribed to young people by the professionals who responded to the abusive incident.

Using the categories of complainant, suspect, witness, and other, young people featured in the nine cases as illustrated in Table 9. Suspects formed the largest group followed by witnesses – the smallest cohort was complainants.

**Table 9 Categorisation of young people across all case files**

Categorisation of young people	Frequency	Percent
Complainant	9	6.2
Suspect	76	52.4
Witness	45	31.0
Other	15	10.3
Total	145	100.0

Using these categories avoids ascribing static victim-perpetrator status to young people in the cases, a divisive form of labelling critiqued in the literature (Melrose, 2013; Pitts, 2013), and explored throughout this chapter<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> It is also important to note that within the categories of suspect, witness and other, young people played the roles of leaders, followers, or bystanders, in ways that disrupted or instigated harm within the case files. These roles were not synonymous with the complainant/suspect categories – for example some suspects were followers and others were leaders. These roles will be explored within the peer group chapter given that they are dependent on group dynamics rather than individual experiences.



### **8.3 Individual demographics**

In keeping with pre-existing evidence (chapters two and three), and the implied nature of the abusive behaviours outlined in the previous chapter, the demographics of the young people featured in the nine cases suggest that the peer-on-peer abuse is both a gendered and age-specific phenomenon.

In the nine case files, and consistent with other research (chapter two): suspects were slightly older than complainants; suspects were predominantly young men who sexually abused and murdered young women within 'intimate relationships' and peer groups; young men were murdered by other young men in group or gang-associated assaults. All of these patterns reinforced hegemonically masculine relations between young men, and between young men and young women, at a developmental time when young people's identities are significantly informed by peer relations. Of the nine complainants, seven were young women and two were young men. All were aged 11-16 at the time the offence took place, with all young women being aged 15 and under and young men being 15-16 years of age (Table 39). Of the 76 young people recorded as suspects within the case files, 92% were young men and 8% were young women. All were aged 13-18 at the time of the abusive incident, and four out of ten were aged 13-14 years (Table 40).

The age trend, but not the gender divide, persists with reference to witnesses and those classified as 'other'. Of the 45 young people who witnessed the abusive incidents 69% were young women and 31% young men aged 11-18 years; nine out of ten were aged 15 years and under (Table 41). Of the 15 young people categorised as 'others', nine were young women and six were young men, aged 13-18.

Findings are also available on the ethnicity<sup>20</sup> of the complainants and suspects in the case files. Both of the young men who were complainants were BME (one was recorded as African and the other as Black British). Young women's ethnicity was more diverse, albeit predominantly BME (Table 10).

**Table 10 Recorded ethnicity of complainants**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Asian	1	11.1
Black British	2	22.2
African Caribbean	1	11.1
African	1	11.1
White British	2	22.2
Mixed WB and African Caribbean	1	11.1
Other	1	11.1
Total	9	100

The vast majority of suspects were also identified as BME (Table 11).

**Table 11 Recorded ethnicity of suspects**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Asian	2	2.6
African Caribbean	9	11.8
African	14	18.4
Black British	34	44.7
Mixed WB and African Caribbean	1	1.3
Mixed WB and African	1	1.3
Turkish	1	1.3
White British (WB)	3	3.9
White Other	4	5.3
Total	69	90.8

<sup>20</sup> Ethnicity was not recorded for 42% of witnesses, but where it was available, close to one in three are recorded as Black British (Table 20) and was inconsistently recorded for those recorded as 'other' in a way that made analysis invalid for this group.

Arguably, ethnicity trends are related to the neighbourhood demographics from which the nine cases were drawn; i.e. the two suspects categorised as 'Asian' were from the same case and reflected the demographics of their peer groups and neighbourhood. Other cases were more diverse: i.e. one rape case involved one suspect identified as White British, one identified as Turkish, and others who were Black British, reflecting the more varied demographic of their neighbourhood. Such an assertion is akin with the explanations given to the recorded ethnicity of gang members in the UK (outlined in chapter two).

While it is unlikely that concrete conclusions can be drawn from the sample size, the relationship between ethnicity and the broader social contexts in which these cases were located will be considered in later chapters. At this stage, as with gender and age, considering the significance of ethnicity in isolation from the contexts in which 'race' is constructed implies essentialism that is discordant with the theoretical approach of my study.

Compared to ethnicity, age and gender, disability was rarely recorded in case files in a way that valid frequency data can be presented, save anecdotal accounts of two suspects with learning disabilities.

Taken in total, therefore, the demographics of the young people in the nine cases are in keeping with the pre-existing evidence base examined in chapter two: suggesting that peer-on-peer abuse is a gendered and age-specific phenomenon; raising questions about ethnicity; and failing to account for disability.

#### **8.4 Vulnerability characteristics**

Beyond individual demographics research indicates that certain behaviours and experiences make some young people more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse than their counterparts (Berelowitz, et al., 2012; Vizard, et al., 2007).

Data from the nine files indicate that such behaviours/experiences were associated with some of the featured complainants more than others. Of the nine:

- Significant bereavements<sup>21</sup> were recorded for four
- Six had been 'truant' from school
- Three had misused drugs and alcohol
- Two had expressed feelings of being suicidal or had attempted suicide
- Eight of the nine complainants were recorded as going missing from home at least once although only five were reported missing to the police. Five were missing on more than three occasions and missing incidents lasted between two and in excess of twenty-four hours; three complainants went missing overnight.

Data on suspects also illustrates a mixed record of vulnerabilities prior to the abusive incidents in question. Of the 76, at least:

- 15% were bereaved
- 75% were recorded as 'truanting'
- 33% were identified as misusing substances
- 5% were recorded as suicidal (although data was missing for 20% of young people).

However, when data on missing episodes is considered, suspects, taken as a cohort, appear more vulnerable than complainants. While both groups went missing, suspects appear to be unaccounted for over longer periods of time. Of the 36 suspects for whom missing data is available, 86% went missing at least once and 79% were missing on three or more occasions prior to the offence in question, across eight out of the nine cases (Table 43). More importantly, data on the length of missing periods is available for 30 suspects: 60% were missing for one to five days or in

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<sup>21</sup> Loss of parent, sibling, cousin or peer 'out of time' i.e. through an illness/accident not related to old-age or as a result of murder/suicide rather than natural loss of a grandparent.

excess of five days, equating to at least two out of ten of all suspects (Table 44). There is little information available as to where suspects were during these missing episodes, exemplified as follows:

4B3 went missing for a week and stated that he had taken £40 which had got him food for the week; reported missing again nine months later. (Case 4, intermittent report of missing episodes)

9B3 went missing for three days after an arrest for affray, following a stop and search...The missing report states that 9B3 returned at approximately 23:00 and was banging on the door to be let in, but his mother refused to open the door because it was late – she knew he had lost his key. He then went missing again and didn't arrive at education, and neither did many of his friends, the following day. (Case 9)

The notion that some suspects were unaccounted for over week-long periods aged 13 and 14 years old is particularly concerning – locating them outside of the home for extensive periods of time: a factor to be considered when the social fields associated to the cases are explored in the later chapters.

In addition to 'vulnerability characteristics', case files contained information about the previous victimisation of complainants and suspects. Prior to the offences in question, five of the eight complainants had already been exposed to, or experienced, physically abusive behaviours, as had the majority of suspects (Table 12).

**Table 12 Previous victimisation of complainants and suspects**

Nature of abuse	Complainants (n)	Complainants (%)	Suspects (n)	Suspects (%)
Physical	5	55.6	58	76.3
Sexual	2	22.2	2	2.6 <sup>22</sup>
Emotional	7	77.8	68	89.5
Cyber	4	44.4	27	35.5

<sup>22</sup> Data is missing for 97% of suspects and is only recorded when it occurs rather than when it doesn't.

It is important to note, and will be illustrated in the following four chapters, that these experiences of victimisation occurred in a range of social spaces<sup>23</sup> and were arguably gendered. Within the nine files, both female suspects and complainants were victimised in a range of contexts that reinforced harmful gendered hierarchies. For example, in Case 5 the female complainant had been sexually abused by men in an intra-familial context from infancy, and in Case 8 the female complainant had been sexually harassed and assaulted in her local neighbourhood by other young men before she was murdered by her ex-partner. A young woman who was a lead suspect in Case 3 had grown up in a home where her father had assaulted his female partners, including her mother, and had been recalled to prison for raping a new partner upon release from custody. In all instances gender relations between men and women, and young men and young women, reinforced the abusive norms that arguably underpinned the incidents between in question.

Comparatively, much of the victimisation experienced by young men, particularly beyond the home, occurred within neighbourhood and peer-group settings where it was relations between young men (and not between them and young women) that determined their status, and safety by proxy. For example, in Case 2 all three suspects were robbed of their mobile phones and repeatedly victimised within their local neighbourhood by other young men before they began committing violent offences against young men and ultimately sexual offences against other young women.

Despite this, while some suspects and complainants in the nine cases had experiences that arguably made them vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse, no vulnerability was consistently shared across all young people in the case files. Most significantly, while pre-existing literature associates histories of victimisation and other identified vulnerabilities in the nine cases files with peer-on-peer abuse suspects (chapter two: for example

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<sup>23</sup> To avoid repetition the details of this will not be rehearsed in this chapter.

Beckett, et al., 2013; Vizard, et al., 2007), 'going missing' is mainly associated with 'victims of sexual exploitation' (Berelowitz, et al., 2012; CEOP, 2011; Sharp, 2013) and is largely a concern linked to young women rather than young men. Yet, 28 out of the 31 suspects recorded as going missing were young men and it is arguably the most pertinent vulnerability associated to the suspects across the nine cases.

Given the evidence in previous chapters of bystander intervention, it is important to note that little is recorded about the vulnerabilities of witnesses in the files. Where information is documented it indicates that of the 45 witnesses at least:

- two were repeat missing young people, and missing on more than three occasions
- one had been suicidal
- twelve were recorded as 'truanting'.

A presence, or absence, of these factors could have contributed towards the ability of some witnesses to act against the rules underpinning abusive incidents. However, the gaps in the data limits the extent to which this can be explored here – instead it is a matter to be returned to with reference to social fields to in future chapters.

## **8.5 Previous offending and gang-association**

Beyond their experiences of victimisation, some complainants and suspects were recorded as having committed offences and/or being gang-associated prior to the abusive incidents in question.

Of the nine complainants: four were recorded as having committed 'offences' in the school environment; two had no further action offences recorded by the police; and two had been convicted of an offence – all were within the category of 'violence against the person' (physical not sexual violence) apart from one incident of criminal damage within a school. Such evidence adds weight to the critique (explored in chapter

two) that attempts to conceptualise those who have been abused by their peers as passive individuals does not reflect the lived reality of some young people.

Case files documented far more extensive and varied offending amongst the 76 suspects. 68% had no further action offences on their records, 42% had been convicted of an offence, and 56% had committed 'offences' in a school environment. These offences were broad in nature: 46% of suspects had committed violent offences prior to the abusive incident; 34% had been involved in robberies; and 12% had committed some form of sexual offence (Table 45).

A history of sexual offending was not restricted to suspects in rape cases. In all three murder files some suspects were identified who had sexual offending in their histories, which included flashing, groping, indecent assaults and sexually threatening behaviour, for example:

[Female] followed home by a group of males. They pushed her up against a wall and put their hands up her skirt, touching her vagina. They stopped when they realised she was crying. (Case 7, a suspect a year prior to the murder)

In five of the six rape cases suspects were recorded as having committed historic sexual offences in the school environment including groping, threats to rape, and collecting indecent images in order to extort money, for example:

During a (social media) conversation 5B1 asked a young woman for sex, she refused so he asked her to strip and threatened to show people (at their school) their conversation if she didn't. She stripped naked for him. A few weeks later she stripped again after he blackmailed her into giving him money in order to leave her alone. (Suspect in Case 5 in the months prior to the offence in question)



In addition to offending behaviour, two-thirds (66%) of suspects were also identified in the files as gang-associated prior to the abusive incident in question – all of these bar one were young men. As a result of their gang association, these young men had harmed others as a group prior to the incident in question and were already defined as a group by the police. Yet, gang association was not a pre-requisite for peer-on-peer abuse. A third of suspects, the majority of whom were also young men, were not recorded as being gang-associated, evidencing that non-gang-associated young people have also murdered and raped their peers.

Comparatively, a third of the nine complainants were gang-associated individuals themselves; two were female and one was male, the nature of which indicates potentially gendered trends in the onset of young people's involvement in offending and gang association. The young man's gang-association preceded the abusive episode in question, whereas for the two young women their gang-association occurred simultaneously with the onset of the abusive period. For the young man, this had involved an extensive history of offending and contact with the police and youth justice services. For the young women this association had led to low-level offending and school-based aggression but in the main was associated to their sexual abuse and exploitation.

Therefore, while the histories of some suspects indicate that the abusive incident occurred following extensive and ongoing offending behaviour, for complainants offending was less problematic and entrenched. Given that the suspect cohort seemed more acutely vulnerable in section 8.4 on account of the length of their missing episodes, it is arguably unsurprising that they also appear more entrenched in offending – activity which itself is a sign of vulnerability.

## **8.6 Agency and resilience**

Despite the above accounts of victimisation, vulnerability and offending behaviour, all complainants in the cases files were in education prior to the

abusive incident. Furthermore, 68% of suspects were recorded as being in education prior to, and during, the abusive period, and 23% did not have any offending on their record prior to the offence in question. Therefore, while they had varying levels of vulnerability, all complainants, and a large number of suspects, demonstrated resilience; they were not simply recipients of harm prior to the abusive incidents in question.

Beyond exemplifying resilience, the agency of complainants and suspects was interpreted in different ways by professionals in the nine cases. Such interpretations sometimes conflated dependency and agency (as critiqued in chapters two and three), where references to young people's individual behaviours were associated with them being wholly, or partially, responsible for their experiences, and therefore not requiring the support of others. For example young women who were raped were described as active agents in their abusive experiences and not wanting the support of professionals:

Social services and other professionals describe her as 'difficult to engage with', 'anti-police' someone who 'places her friends and gang associates as a higher importance than her family.' (Case 4)

[G1 has] no 'moral or ethical compass to guide her judgments or choices or actions'...G1 is 'sexually aware.' (Case 5)

Comparatively little attention was paid, in the files, to the individual choices or behaviours of young men or young women who were murdered. In these cases the focus shifted from complainant to suspect agency. This occurred despite the fact that: in one case a murder complainant arrived to take part in a fight alongside their peers; in another they had been involved in physical fights with suspects in the weeks prior to the murder; and in the other case peers stated that the complainant had been in multiple exploitative relationships prior to her murder. Similar behaviours amongst rape complainants were used to conceptualise them as active agents in their own abuse, but in murder files this was not the case. This implies

potential gendered, and offence specific, bias amongst those tasked with safeguarding young people – a matter to be explored in the later chapters concerned with professional responses to the nine cases.

In a similar vein to which the vulnerability of complainants was overlooked with reference to their agency, young men who were suspects were conceptualised by professionals solely as a risk to others without connecting it to their own experiences of vulnerability. Language in the case files illustrated the ways in which individual agency, choice, and therefore culpability were equally attributed to all young men suspected of being involved in the offences in question:

(15 year old suspect described by the police as a) 'Confident ...dangerous man'. (Case 8)

'He is extremely aggressive and angry and seems to believe that he is some sort of gang leader and gangster. He has absolutely no respect for authority be it teachers or police'. (Case 4)

Whilst there were also examples of professionals identifying ways in which suspects were vulnerable to abuse, 'there are things happening outside school which place him at risk' (Case 6), these vulnerabilities were not connected to young people's sense of power and control at the point of the abusive incident. This did not equally apply to all young women who were suspects. In Case 3 the abuse that the female suspect had experienced at home was used by education and safeguarding professionals to explain her abusive behaviour and in some instances to excuse and ignore it. It is possible that this exception was on account of the fact that the female suspect had been abused at home, whereas many male suspects had been abused on the street. However, as the following chapters will demonstrate, some young men were also exposed to domestic abuse, neglect and physical abuse at home and these experiences were not connected to their own abusive behaviours in the same way that professionals did for the female suspect in Case 3.

Given that only nine cases are under consideration it is not possible to further explore this exception. However, the available data is sufficient to demonstrate that in the nine files, at the point in which a young man committed a harmful act, or a young woman was perceived as actively engaging with abusive individuals, agency in that moment superseded contextual vulnerability. Such an approach failed to socially construct consent and culpability, applied gendered stereotypes and expectations onto young people, and had implications for the ways in which childhood and adolescence were constructed pre-and-post the abusive incidents; issues that will be returned to and discussed in future chapters.

### **8.7 Summary findings and discussion: the individual young people**

This chapter has outlined the recorded individual demographics, behaviours and experiences of 145 young people featured across the nine case files. Key findings are that:

1. Of the 145 young people, nine were complainants, 76 were suspects, 45 were witnesses and 15 took an 'other' role at the point of the abusive incident. The complainant sample size is much smaller than that of suspects or witnesses.
2. Gender was the only consistent characteristic amongst rape complainants – all of them being young women, but this did not translate into murder case files.
3. The vast majority of suspects, 92%, were young men – who were involved in all nine cases. Young women featured as suspects in two cases, and were involved in assisting young men to intimidate complainants in seven cases.
4. Complainants were slightly younger than suspects, however there was a clustering of all young people involved aged 13-15 years old.
5. A large number of complainants, suspects, and witnesses, were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

6. There wasn't one individual vulnerability or behaviour consistent across the complainant group. Some complainants had experiences that made them vulnerable to abuse, but these experiences were not shared across the cohort.
7. As a group, suspects presented with more acute vulnerabilities than complainants – those who went missing did so for far longer periods of time than complainants, and they were more likely as a cohort to have experienced physical victimisation prior to the incident and from a younger age.
8. While complainants were victimised at the point of the abusive incident and in the escalation toward that offence, suspects were more likely to have been victimised, particularly physically, prior to the abusive period.
9. Likewise, complainants were more likely to have committed offences and become gang-associated during or following the abusive incident. Whereas suspects were more likely to have been gang-associated, and committed offences, prior to the abusive incident.
10. Professional responses to individual young people in the cases demonstrated complex, and gendered, reactions to 'agency'. The agency of rape complainants was associated with the abuse that they experienced; this was not the case with young people who were murdered. At the moments in which a young man committed a harmful act, or a young woman was perceived as actively engaging with abusive individuals, the professional response focused on agency above contextual vulnerability.

The demographics of the young people involved in the nine cases, and their individual biographies, add weight to the notion that peer-on-peer abuse is both an age-specific and gendered phenomenon. Young women and young men experienced different trends in relation to the age at which they experienced peer-on-peer abuse, the nature and extent of their

vulnerabilities prior to the incident in question, and the onset of their offending and gang-association. However, the data presented thus far fails to explore why these trends existed across the nine cases and doesn't account for inconsistencies in the complainant and suspect profiles. The relevance of these individual characteristics/behaviours cannot be understood in absence of the social contexts in which they were constructed, or occurred.

Therefore, the following four chapters will build upon the evidenced nature of the abusive behaviours and individual characteristics of those involved in the nine cases by considering the social fields associated to the offences under investigation. Family homes will be considered first, followed by peer groups, schools and then neighbourhoods. In light of research about the public and fluid nature of young people's intimate relationships (Barter, et al., 2009; Beckett, et al., 2013; Chung, 2005; Firmin, 2011) these will be considered in relation to peer groups. The nature of each field will be assessed with reference to evidence of resilience/protection in addition to the following harm categories (as outlined in chapter five):

- Abusive behaviours (referred to as child protection concerns with reference to the home) including sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect<sup>24</sup>
- Domestic abuse / intimate partner violence and gender norms
- Criminality
- Struggle to safeguard / capacity to parent.

For the purposes of this thesis evidence of the above will be used to categorise contexts (homes, peer groups, schools, neighbourhoods) as 'harmful' or 'safe'. Such categorisation is not used to imply that there were no protective factors within 'harmful' environments, nor that such harm

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<sup>24</sup> Neglect will only be considered for the home environment

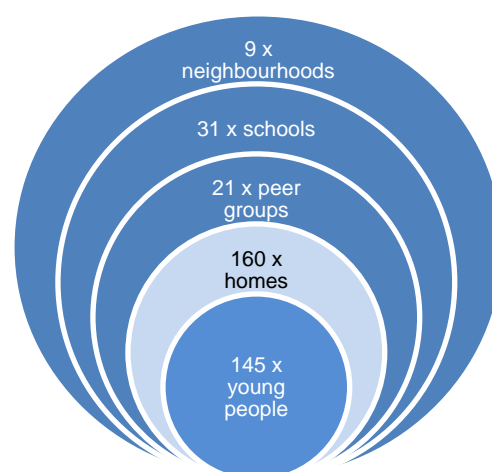
pre-determined the abusive incidents, or that safe environments did not feature unrecorded aspects of 'harm'. Rather this categorisation highlights harmful aspects of the social field that informed part of the contextual fabric associated to the abusive incident.

Each social field will be presented and discussed before all social fields, and their interplay with social agents, are considered together, with reference to pre-existing literature and the theoretical framework underpinning my study. This process will explore the relationship between the individual agents and contexts featured in the files, and in doing so will offer a socio-cultural account of nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse.

## 9. Findings: the social field of the home

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the social field of the home as it featured in the nine cases. Information was available on the living arrangements of 67% (n=97) of the young people across the files. Of those where information was available 90% were living with at least one parent at the point of the abusive incident (60% lived with both parents).



**Table 13 Recorded living arrangements of young people across all case files**

Living arrangement	Frequency	Valid Percent
with parents	58	59.8
with one parent	29	29.9
other relative	2	2.1
LA fostering	5	5.2
semi-independent	3	3.1
Total	97	100.0
Missing data	48	
Total	145	

Where information was documented on the quality and safety of homes featured in the nine cases, there was evidence that at least 33% of young people (n=48) were exposed to, or experienced, harm<sup>25</sup> in their home environment (referred to as 'harmful' homes in this thesis) and 21% (n=30)

<sup>25</sup> With reference to the categories outlined in the previous chapter and in methodology Chapter 5.



of young people were living in safe households at the point of the abusive incident. For the remaining 46%, the nature of their home environment was unknown: neither harm nor safety was explicitly recorded in the files.

In identifying harm and support, this chapter assesses the field of the home and the ways in which it interplayed with the young people, and other fields, across the nine cases. Understanding the extent to which homes contested or reinforced the harmful, and stereotypically gendered, rules associated to the abusive incidents will assist in developing a socio-cultural account of peer-on-peer abuse across the nine cases. If, as an environment upon which young people were dependent, the rules of the home challenged harmful social rules, then it arguably offered a space for the generative nature of the habitus to be explored (and therefore for individuals to act differently).

## **9.2 Evidence of supportive/protective factors in homes**

From the outset, it is important to consider that in nearly all cases under consideration, despite living in safe and arguably protective homes some young people, including three complainants, were affected by peer-on-peer abuse. In only one of the nine featured cases were all of the young people involved recorded in the files as living in 'harmful' homes<sup>26</sup>. In two cases more young people were recorded as experiencing safety, than harm, at home at the point of the abusive incident (Table 14).

A safe home, therefore, was not sufficient to guard against significant harm beyond the home environment in the nine cases. The extent to which this can be understood is somewhat restricted due to the minimal, qualitative, evidence on the nature of supportive households. Files largely documented *concerns* about a young person's home environment, and therefore information on the interface between supportive homes and other environments/individuals is relatively sparse.

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<sup>26</sup> The case, in which everyone involved is recorded as living in a harmful home, is also the only case of rape in which the lead suspect is a young woman.

**Table 14 Young people in 'harmful' homes by case number of data available**

		Harm recorded in homes where available in files (n=78)			
		Yes (n)	Yes (%)	No (n)	No (%)
<b>Case ID</b>	<b>1</b>	4	5.1	11	14.1
	<b>2</b>	3	3.8	1	1.3
	<b>3</b>	6	7.7	0	0
	<b>4</b>	8	10.3	2	2.6
	<b>5</b>	4	5.1	6	7.7
	<b>6</b>	1	1.3	1	1.3
	<b>7</b>	7	9.0	1	1.3
	<b>8</b>	9	11.5	4	5.1
	<b>9</b>	6	7.7	4	5.1
<b>Total</b>		<b>48</b>	<b>61.5%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>38.5%</b>

Where it was recorded, support was more likely to be evidenced in homes of complainants at the point of disclosure. As later chapters will demonstrate, concern for the safety of complainants rather than suspects was prioritised post disclosure (sub-section 14.9). Suspect's homes were investigated in terms of their ability to 'control' rather than 'support' young people; it is therefore unsurprising that information was recorded in this manner.

Evidence of supportive homes/families was recorded as exemplified:

2G1 disclosed assault to parent immediately and was being comforted by sister when police arrived. (Case 2, complainant family)

G1 mother attended school and sat with her daughter, they both cried (about the abusive incident). (Case 6, complainant family)

While such examples do not evidence why a supportive household could not protect a young person from peer-on-peer abuse they do demonstrate safety in the home/family environments of two complainants. In these instances the home offered support when the peer group, school, or wider

neighbourhood posed a risk, even though in these examples it was following, rather than preceding, a crisis.

The limitations posed by these examples of 'safety' are further illuminated through an analysis the interplay between the home and social fields external to it – the latter impacting upon the extent to which homes could act as a protective factor for young people in the files. Just over half of complainants' parents/carers and a quarter of suspects' parents sought support to safeguard their young people. Help-seeking is arguably the clearest indication of the interplay between the home, individual young people, and other social fields, and with that the limitations of the home environment as a protective factor for the young people in the files.

### **9.3 Capacity to parent and help-seeking**

The most consistent concern documented in the files regarding the home was parental inability (or reduced capacity) to safeguard young people from harm. 94% of young people living in 'harmful' homes experienced a lack of parental capacity to safeguard – accounting for 34% of all young people across the nine cases, as exemplified:

Mother stated that 'there were things going on in 4G1 world that she did not have access to' ... She described that 4G1 was 'being controlled by others who were more powerful' than her mother. (Case 4, complainant's parent)

(7B4) hit by his mother in front of a teacher - teacher had to physically pull the mother away from her child. She was very distraught and shaken and stated she finds it difficult to cope with her son. (Case 7, suspect's parent)

Over half of the families/carers who were recorded as struggling to safeguard young people (n=26) had asked for help:

1B1 Mother had reported that her son's behaviour was 'out of control' a year before ... 1B5 Mother had called the police to report her son missing stating that she was struggling to manage his behaviour and that he was returning home with unexplained amounts of money and would pack a bag and stay with friends. (Case 1, suspects' parents)

4G1 was taken to a police station by her mother who stated that she couldn't cope with her behaviour. (Case 4, complainant's parent)

6B1 mother came into the school stating that she was concerned about 6B1 'behaviour and attitude at home' (when he was 13)... '6B1 does not do as asked at home. Switches his mobile off so he does not have to speak to parent.' (Case 6, suspect's parent)

Qualitative examples of struggles to safeguard and help-seeking behaviour both suggest that incapacity to parent was largely influenced by factors beyond the home environment. Parents were seeking support to safeguard young people from what they were exposed to within school, peer groups, or in the local neighbourhood, both online and offline, rather than from abuse within the home itself: suggesting that the interplay between the home, young people, and other social fields reduced the extent to which the home could act as a protective factor in the nine cases.

#### **9.4 Evidence of harm in homes – an overview**

Despite evidence of safety, and attempts to safeguard, files also contained extensive evidence of young people being harmed at home across all nine cases. As with their individual characteristics/behaviours, suspects appeared the most vulnerable cohort with reference to their home environments, across all categories, demonstrated in Table 15.

**Table 15 Comparison of suspect's homes to all young people in the case files**

	All young people in files (%)	All young people in files (n)	Suspects (%)	Suspects (n)
Identified harm in home	33.1	48	43.4	33
Living with domestic abuse	17.2	25	23.7	18
Intra-familial child protection	17.9	26	23.7	18
Other child protection concerns	22.0	32	30.0	22
Reduced capacity to parent	33.8	49	46.1	35

Whether suspects led or followed at the point of the abusive incident will be explored in later chapters. However, with reference to homes, it is worth noting that, where data is available, experiences of 'harmful' homes were more acute for suspects who led the nine abusive incidents as opposed to those who followed:

- 87% of leaders were exposed to or experienced harm in the home, whereas 66% of followers were in a similar situation
- Likewise, 66% of leaders were in households where they were exposed to domestic abuse, compared to 50% of followers.

Of the nine complainants, two-thirds (six) were recorded as having been harmed at home<sup>27</sup>:

- two had experienced or been exposed to domestic abuse
- three had experienced child protection issues - one of whom had been sexually abused
- five experienced additional safeguarding concerns including four whose parents had mental health issues.

This overview demonstrates that despite some suspects and some complainants being harmed at home, these experiences, as with individual characteristics, were not consistent across the nine cases to the extent that they could predict the 'likelihood' of peer-on-peer abuse occurring.

<sup>27</sup> Given the small sample size of complainants a quantitative comparison is not particularly helpful.

The following sub-sections offer a more detailed account of harm within the home in the nine cases with reference to domestic abuse, gender norms and child protection related abusive behaviours.

### **9.5 Domestic abuse and harmful gender norms**

Of those young people identified as living in 'harmful' home environments, over half (57%) experienced domestic abuse between parents/carers prior to, during and/or following the time of the abusive incident, for example:

Mother has got into an argument with the father and has also been hit.... During an argument between his parents, father grabbed mother causing her to hit her head. She then hit the dad over the head with an iron (Case 7, murder, home of two suspects)

Police are called to the home repeatedly in relation to domestic abuse... (when 9 years old) 3G1 rang the police as she was 'fearing for her mother's safety' (Case 3, rape, home of complainant)

All case file accounts of domestic abuse within homes were incidents of men abusing women, establishing unequal gendered hierarchies between men and women for some complainants, suspects and witnesses. Exposure to domestic abuse was recorded from infancy in eight of the nine cases, ensuring that from an early age young people were exposed to hegemonically masculine relations in keeping with those that underpinned the abusive incidents themselves.

In addition to domestic abuse, examples of harmful gender attitudes were documented in the files. For example, in Case 8, three of the young women and one of the young men in the complainant's peer group (witnesses), were physically and emotionally abused in their homes as parents enforced stereotypical ideals about gender roles and relations. In this case, attempts were made to keep young women indoors and away

from young men, thus protecting their 'honour', while their male peers were encouraged to accept harmful gendered rules, for example:

In the year of the offence 8G3 'was hit by her mother after she was seen hanging around with boys' and (when) officers attended to speak to 8G3 about a possible forced marriage with her cousin she disclosed that her father had hit her.

In three other cases some parents of suspects and of witnesses drew upon gendered stereotypes to blame complainants, reproducing rather than challenging, both the harmful norms which underpinned the abusive incidents and the response of professionals to young women's agency documented in the previous chapter:

'I don't think they realised that the tarts version of events didn't go as planned in court. Her whole story was proved to be bullshit and her credibility was fucked.' (Case 3, social media entry parent of a suspect)

(When talking about the rape):

'u see how girls have power'

'i no'

'dats wat my mum tol me time ago. My mumz like females can hurt men in so many ways. I didn't realize wh she ment...but now i do.'

(Case 1, social media conversation between suspects)

Such examples of defensive/problematic parental attitudes reflect findings of research into some families of young people with sexually harmful behaviour (Hackett, et al., 2014). However taken together, such accounts of domestic abuse and gender stereotyping demonstrate that, for some young people in the files, harmful social scripts were embodied and reproduced in their home environments rather than challenged. These were not spaces in which young people could employ the generative capacity of the habitus and challenge the abusive behaviours/attitudes of their peers, or even recognise them as problematic.

## **9.6 Abuse and criminality in the home**

As outlined in chapter two, research associates experiences of intra-familial abuse with young people's involvement in peer-on-peer abuse. Based on case file information, at the point of the abusive incident, a similar proportion of young people (54%) were living in a 'harmful' home as a result of child protection concerns as were living in homes with domestic abuse (Table 46). In most cases this was through an experience of neglect (35%). For a quarter of young people physical abuse (26%) was identified, 4% were recorded as having experienced intra-familial sexual abuse, and 11% were known to have been emotionally abused – with many experiencing a combination of abuse types. For some young people this abuse was chronic and layered:

G1 was exposed to 'violent and disturbing' images at a young age and as such her emotional development is distorted. G1 watched her mother's boyfriend stab himself ... aged 4/5 years. G1 mother disclosed that she believed G1 was sexually abused aged 2. (Case five, complainant)

As an environment upon which young people were dependent for their development, experiences of abuse within the home reduced the capacity of parents/carers to protect young people from peer-on-peer abuse, and contributed to the levels of emotional detachment recorded in Chapter 7.

In addition to traditional child protection issues, over two in ten (n=10) of the young people growing up in 'harmful' homes experienced parental mental health issues:

3G14: Mother had threatened to kill herself and her father had also threatened to kill himself on separate incidents. (Case 3, parents of lead suspect)



Just over three in ten (n=14) were physically and/or emotionally abused by a sibling, in some cases pushing young people from the home environment into external social fields:

At the first missing episode 4B4 stated that he was being bullied by his mother and sisters and this explained why he had gone missing.  
(Case 4, suspect, sibling abuse)

Sibling abuse was also linked to familial gang-association. While just over one in ten of the young people across the case files were growing up in a gang-associated family (n=17), such association was recorded as being most heavily influenced by sibling affiliation. In 71% of such families gang-association was the result of sibling's involvement, compared to 11% (n=2) who had a gang-involved parent. Gang associations drew social fields external to the home into the family environment, explicitly illustrating social field interplay through social agents. Literature on gang-related violence would suggest that through this process hyper-masculine ideals would have been brought into the home, with the gang itself built upon hegemonically masculine gender relations (Pitts 2008, Firmin 2011).

The varied nature of the child protection concerns documented in this subsection implies that for some young people in the files, abuse in their home meant that:

- it was not a safe/nurturing field in which the generative capacity of the habitus could embody difference
- social agents developed with a dependency on an environment that was not protective or resilience-building.

The extent to which such experiences also resulted in acts of symbolic violence warrants consideration – and will be discussed in later chapters. While causal relationships cannot be established between such experiences of abuse and the behaviours outlined in chapter seven, they

go some way to creating an impression of the coercive environments to which the abusive incidents were associated.

### **9.7 Summary findings: the social field of the home**

Having considered the social field of the home, as it related to the 145 young people, featured across nine cases, this chapter demonstrates that:

1. At least a third of the young people in the files had experienced or been exposed to harm in the home environment by the point of the abusive incident.
2. At least one in five young people, including a third of the nine complainants, were in a safe home at the point of the abusive incident.
3. In all but one case some young people were living in safe homes at the point of the abusive incident. Being exposed to harm in the home was not a pre-requisite of peer-on-peer abuse, and a safe home was not a pre-requisite for safety beyond that environment.
4. A greater proportion of suspects were living in 'harmful' homes than the proportion across all young people featured within the case files.
5. Domestic abuse was the most commonly recorded safeguarding issue recorded within 'harmful' homes, followed by neglect, demonstrating young people's exposure to harmful gendered norms within the home environment featured in the files.
6. The most common concern for 'harmful' homes was the inability of parents or carers to safeguard a young person from risk external to the home. 18% of all parents, a quarter of suspects' parents, and just over half of complainants' parents, asked for help to protect their young person from risk outside of the home.
7. Parental help-seeking behaviour demonstrated that not all homes in the case files reproduced rules conducive with peer-on-peer abuse. To this extent parents attempted to offer a space in which young people could utilise agency and act differently. Yet, questions

remain as to the extent to which this space was sufficient to enable social change when interfacing with harm in other social fields.

8. Although not a pre-requisite for involvement in the abusive incidents under examination, exposure to, or experience of, certain forms of harm within the home environment introduced and reinforced the gendered and abusive norms underpinning the offences and removed a route to safety for those living with them.

Analysis of data on the home environments featured in the files begins to contextualise the key findings from previous chapters. Home environments were variable as were the individual biographies of young people featured in the nine cases. Yet, where harm was identified in the home environment, gendered and age-specific themes continue to emerge, through exposure to harmful gender relations and the tussle between home and peer influence respectively. Both findings are demonstrative of the interplay between agency and structure. Despite social constructions of childhood which imply that children do as they are told (James and James 2004), young people in the case files were not simply subjects of the rules of the home. Rather they were engaged as agents in a reflexive relationship between harm in the home, harm beyond the home, and protection within and beyond the home, that reproduced or challenged the rules associated to abusive incidents.

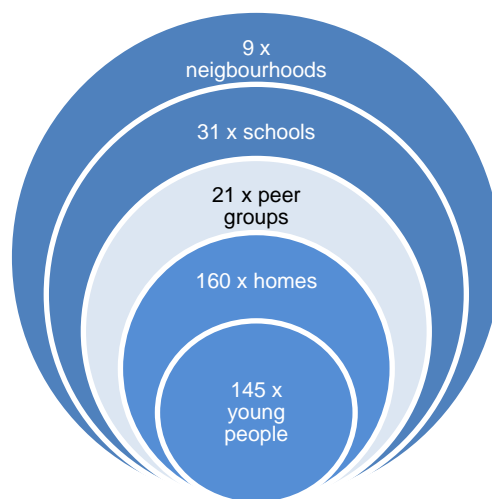
To explore why young people's experiences of safety at home did not guarantee safety beyond the home, and how their experiences of harm at home related to the abusive incidents in question, other social sites (peer group, school and neighbourhood) require consideration. It is to these social fields that this thesis now turns its attention.

## 10. Findings: the social field of the peer group

### 10.1 Introduction

Previous chapters suggested that in the nine cases under investigation:

- harm in some young people's homes had implications for their peer groups
- harm within their peer groups, along with other fields external to the home, had implications for parent/carers capacity to safeguard young people
- the peer group dynamic during the escalation period, and at the point of the abusive incident: provided a public context in which hegemonically masculine relations could be pursued; informed the parameters of culpability and consent; and was not so determined as to restrict the ability of some young people to challenge the peer group of which they were a part.



21 peer groups<sup>28</sup>, sometimes extending into wider networks, were identified within the files – defined as the connections that young people had with others of a similar age with whom they were not related. Of all the social fields that young people navigated in the nine cases, the peer group was the one in which harm was most consistently identified. 97% (n=140 of 145) of the young people in the nine cases were recorded as coming

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<sup>28</sup> Some suspects and complainants were associated to more than one peer group, and on other occasions shared peer groups.

into contact with harm in 18 out of the 21 peer groups identified - referred to as 'harmful' for the purposes of this thesis<sup>29</sup>.

Of the 140 young people who came into contact with harm in this field:

- 100% were in emotionally abusive peer groups
- 94% were in groups that reproduced harmful gender norms in behaviours and/or language
- 94% were in physically abusive groups
- 71% were in sexually 'harmful' groups (with reference to Hackett's continuum 2011)
- 62% were in groups that engaged in other criminal and offending behaviours.

Literature explored in chapter two implied an association between young people being in a 'harmful' peer group and either being in a harmful relationship and/or committing abusive acts. Such a suggestion is borne out in my data – in all nine cases harm in at least one peer group, of the complainant and/or suspect, was associated to the abusive incident in question.

This chapter will consider the:

- relationship between peer groups and the abusive incidents outlined in chapter seven
- peer group dynamics associated to those incidents
- evidence of broader abusive behaviours, intimate relationship abuse, and harmful gender norms, which featured within peer groups in the nine case files and arguably underpinned the abusive incidents themselves

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<sup>29</sup> This shorthand is used to indicate that this environment was one where young people from the case files were exposed to harm, even if it also had elements of protection or safety.

- peer attempts to safeguard one another through bystander interventions and the fostering of positive relationships.

In total this chapter evidences the operation of harmful, gendered social scripts within peer groups in the files, embodied by most, but not all of, the young people within them. To identify a possible explanation for why some young people in the files challenged peer norms and attempted to disrupt abuse, the interplay between peer groups and other fields requires assessment.

## **10.2 Peer group association to the abusive incident**

Information in Table 16 highlights the varied ways in which peer groups played host to, directly engaged in, and provided a harmful context for, the abusive incidents in question.

The data in Table 16, considered in light of the evidence on abusive behaviours documented in chapter seven, clearly indicates that the abusive incidents in question were largely interwoven with the norms and behaviours of peer groups. Peer groups provided a conducive context in which hegemonically masculine gender relations could be pursued, whether that was: the peer performance of sexual violence and the control of women in all six rape cases (including case 3 where the lead suspect was a young woman); the struggle for status between young men in the two cases where they were murdered; and the control and ownership of a young woman in an intimate relationship in case 8. These relations also established, changed and reinforced peer hierarchies, to be considered in the following sub-section on peer group dynamics– which in turn informed differing experiences of power and ultimately culpability.

**Table 16 Influence of the peer network by case**

Case ID	Example of peer influence
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suspects assisted one another in sexually harming the complainant e.g. holding the head of the victim while another suspect orally rapes her</li> <li>• Suspects directed one another about how they should harm the victim</li> <li>• Harmful gender stereotypes were stated out loud during the assault</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One suspect had no recorded offences in his history and yet committed a serious sexual offence when initiated by two of his peers</li> <li>• Two suspects told a third when join in the assault and when to stop</li> <li>• Two suspects held the complainant down while a third assaulted her</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One suspect told another suspect how to sexually assault the complainant</li> <li>• A suspect moved the head of the complainant while another orally raped her</li> <li>• Two witnesses laughed during the abusive incident</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suspects approached the complainant after the initial abusive incident stating that she now had to engage in sexual activity with them as well</li> <li>• Multiple members of the peer group groped and assaulted the complainant</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suspects had sexually harmed and assaulted young women together</li> <li>• Suspects reassured one another and blamed the complainant</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peers of the complainant normalised sexual harassment when she disclosed to them</li> <li>• Peer of the suspect followed him to the complainant's to demand sex following the initial rape</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peers were recruited into the incident via social media conversations</li> <li>• One suspect used gender stereotypes held by the group to create an impression that (male) suspects needed to protect their status/reputation through the use of violence</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The peer group did not challenge those who spat at and punched the complainant</li> <li>• Young men in the peer group approached the complainant stating that she had to have sex with them as she was perceived to have done so with others</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One suspect told peers that if she didn't take part she would be assaulted</li> <li>• Two suspects had physically assaulted partners during the escalation period</li> </ul>

### **10.3 Peer group dynamic during the abusive period**

From the data available, it is possible to establish the group roles played by 123 young people across the nine cases. 'Suspects' or 'witnesses' to the abusive incident played the roles of leaders, followers, positive

bystanders (who discouraged harmful behaviour), and negative bystanders (who encouraged harmful behaviour) as outlined in Table 17:

**Table 17 Frequency of primary roles played by young people against case file**

		Frequencies of role during the offence			
		Leader	Follower	Bystander+	Bystander-
<b>Case ID</b>	<b>1 (Rape)</b>	2	6	5	3
	<b>2 (Rape)</b>	1	2	0	0
	<b>3 (Rape)</b>	2	0	4	5
	<b>4 (Rape)</b>	2	12	3	4
	<b>5 (Rape)</b>	1	4	0	4
	<b>6 (Rape)</b>	1	5	4	2
	<b>7 (Murder)</b>	4	17	0	1
	<b>8 (Murder)</b>	4	3	11	0
	<b>9 (Murder)</b>	3	3	4	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	20	52	31	20

As illustrated above, the vast majority of young people in the case files were identified as followers and bystanders, with only 16% (n=20) assuming a leadership role during the abusive period. In keeping with the MPR research examined in chapter two, young people primarily led through participation in the nine offences. In such instances leaders often acted first, as exemplified in the following exert:

G1 didn't feel like she had a choice (as B1) 'kept harassing her via texts and phone calls'. When she said she didn't want to have sex with B1 again he said – 'just come'. (G1 was) anally raped and then B1 invited friends – 'he did ask her if she wanted to and she shrugged her shoulders and didn't say yes or no because she felt that since he had forced her once he would do it again'. 4 boys then anally raped her (B1, B4, B5, B6). Threatened with physical violence by two others boys who were present. (Case 5, rape, suspect young man)



The above example demonstrates how, through his actions, the leader sets the parameters of consent, and behavioural expectations, for the remainder of the group to follow. In keeping with Powell's findings on young people and consent, the complainant appears to display symbolic violence in response to the leader's requests for sex. She didn't say no as in this hegemonically masculine hierarchy the social rules were such that she had no power and didn't believe her views/behaviours would make a difference. Recognising the power of the leader in this instance is integral to demonstrating the complainant's lack of consent, and potentially variable extents of culpability amongst followers, both with reference to the social field of the peer group and the leader's position within it.

In addition to leading through participation, in seven cases young people gave instructions to others during the abusive incidents, for example:

B1 is the ringleader – [while he was the first to rape G1] at one point telling B2 'you need to fuck it properly, do it'. Described as being stood by with his arms folded and watching as other members of the group raped G1. He also decided on the locations to go to and when G1 could leave. (Case 1, rape, suspect young man)

Although leadership was primarily the domain of young men in the case files, in cases 3 and 9 young women led, and did so through instruction as exemplified in the following extract<sup>30</sup>:

G14 was banging on the door and telling them to open it. They opened the door and G14 came in and had G2 phone with her and was taking photos. G14 was saying 'go on fuck him'. G1 was sat on top of B6 when the vaginal rape took place. G14 then said 'give him brain' and G1 got on her knees. G14 grabbed the back of G1 head

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<sup>30</sup> In one case a female leader had partial physical involvement but this was an extension of verbal instruction – she moves the complainants body with her foot while telling another suspect what he should be doing

and was pushing her head up and down. ... G14 then told G1 to stand up and sit on B6 again – another vaginal rape took place. (Case 3, rape, suspect young woman)

When young women took on such leadership roles they reinforced hegemonically masculine power relations and distinguished themselves from their female peers through their involvement in abuse. It is also important to note that on both these occasions young women led alongside a young man and did not act alone. Most young women who were suspects, however, abused their peers within traditional structural roles and followed the leadership of their male peers/partners.

Examples of leadership through direction within the case files go against the evidence examined in chapter two, which suggested such a leadership style was the domain of adults when influencing children. Arguably, being able to lead peers through verbal direction implies an even greater sense of power/authority amongst the leaders in the files – where followers in the group embodied the discourse of the leader even though he/she did not engage in the same behaviour.

In addition to influencing their peers, in five of the six rape cases there is evidence that those who led the abusive incident (all young men) also sexually offended alone. Conversely, files only record followers committing sexual offences in the company of their peer group. This finding reinforces the critique of Porter (2013) and Allen's (2011) theory of 'equal culpability' outlined in chapter two. While leaders were supported by followers and negative bystanders it doesn't follow that without peer support leaders would not have sexually harmed their peers – whereas this may be true for those who were in follower and bystander positions.

Evidence of young people changing roles during the abusive period also supports the idea, espoused in chapter two, that engagement in group-based offending was motivated by social bonding and ultimately a pursuit

of hegemonic masculinity. While followers and bystanders did not seem to commit serious offences alone, in ways that those who led did, they dynamically assumed leadership roles when in the company of their peer group. Of the available data, a third of the suspects and bystanders across the nine cases switched roles during the abusive period, identified through both behaviour and linguistics. 14% of young people moved from following to leading, all except one were young men:

1B2 [who had been following 1B1] directs 1G1 'walk up the stairs or I'll beat you up' and told her 'pull them down before I kick you in the head.' (Case 1)

In rape cases, as in the example above, young men who had followed the lead of a peer used their own initiative to give orders to the complainant. These acts enabled followers to demonstrate their leadership capabilities within the group, providing a platform for them to re-assign hierarchies between them and their peers, and demonstrating their 'masculinity' to those whom they had originally followed. Such behaviour between young men was particularly pertinent in files where sequences of rapes were under investigation as opposed to one incident. In these instances young men within the suspect peer group led during some rapes and on other occasions followed their peers. For example: in Case 4 a peer group had a leader who, through his behaviour and language, directed the group during initial offences. Over time followers embodied their 'feel for' the rules in the peer group field, realising power/status as achieved through the relations between the young men through their abuse of young women, and led assaults without the direction of the primary leader.

The spread of gendered and abusive social rules can also be seen with bystanders. 6% of the 145 young people in the files moved from being bystanders to being directly engaged in the abusive behaviour:

3G2 and 3G3 (who had initially tried to defend the complainant as positive bystanders) were egging on 3G14 and when 3B6

came in they were laughing (becoming negative bystanders).  
(Case 3)

In the above example it is young women who reproduced harmful gendered stereotypes, encouraging the young woman and young man who were leading the rape while blaming and laughing at the young woman who was being assaulted. Such instances of bystander engagement exemplify the use of symbolic violence by young people who arguably conform to social rules as a result of powerlessness and a need for self-protection at times of crisis. As a result, rather than being in pursuit of hegemonic masculinity, bystanders in the case files seemed to engage in abuse as a means of securing safety within a hegemonically masculine field. The two bystanders in the case above were acquitted of the rape of which they were accused as the jury recognised the levels of coercion that surrounded their decision-making process – and in doing so applied a social model of culpability to understand this role change.

Detailed consideration of peer group dynamics has demonstrated that in addition to hosting abusive incidents, the gendered dynamics of groups/networks informed peer hierarchies and consequently the parameters of consent and culpability. During the abusive period individuals interplayed with the peer group dynamic in pursuit of hegemonic masculine peer relations and arguably safety – a point to be explored throughout this chapter. However, the peer groups in the case files did not simply host the abusive incident in isolation. As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the majority of peer groups in the case files were 'harmful' beyond the incident in question. The nature of this harm will now be considered in the following sub-sections, starting with evidence of abuse and criminality, followed by attention to intimate relationship abuse and gender norms, within the featured peer groups.

#### **10.4 Abuse and criminality in the peer group**

This sub-section gives greater consideration to the qualitative nature of the harm that existed within peer groups, and contextualises the relationship between this field and the abusive incidents.

Complainants and suspects came into contact via their association to the same peer groups in seven cases. In at least seven cases complainants were in emotionally abusive peer groups, in three they were in sexually abusive peer groups and in seven their peer groups were physically abusive. Much of this association was integral to the abusive incident that they experienced. Comparatively in eight cases suspects were associated with 'harmful' peer groups prior to the abusive incident. This ongoing association with harm via the peer group meant suspects navigated a persistent climate of abusive norms exemplified in the following social media conversation between suspects:

'mana gt moved up 2day init'  
'by who blud'  
'4 real manz dnt no buh lyk me n ma boiz B2, B4 and B5 were  
jamming den BX musta came wid bag of fucking X guys init tried  
movin rage and shit'  
AND  
'be alert theres 65 of man'  
'yh. So 65 man area ll on dis dirtz ting yh'  
'thats why some of us think there a bit to big for there boots.'  
(Case 1, Social media conversation about physical violence  
between peer groups)

Routine physical and emotional abuse was an identifying feature of these groups:

5B3: approached a male with one other person, asked him where he was from and what gang, punched him and took his chain/phone ... ABH on a male in a leisure centre changing room where a knife was also pulled – as male would not disclose the address of a friend; common assault on a female – part of group who physically assaulted a young woman who refused to return the calls of one of his friends (Case 5, suspect peer group)

Whether they engaged in violence against young women, or violence against other young men, the behaviour of suspects (predominantly young men) reinforced harmful gendered relations and served to maintain abusive norms within this social field:

The nature of the offending amongst the peer group was, in the main, violent offending, weapon possession and robbery. However, three of the six males in the accused group had offences against partners or ex-partners on their suspect profile – physical assaults for all three, and 9B2 had committed two sexual assaults alongside his peers. The peer group presents as one that is violent towards their female peers, and particularly partners, and where group-based sexual offending has taken place. (Case 9, murder suspects)

Whilst other criminal behaviour featured amongst 79% of suspects' peers and half of complainants' peers, it was the least prevalent characteristic of 'harmful' peer groups in the files. Emotional abuse, unequal gender relations and the use of physical abuse, were far more consistent: in the files a broader criminal identity was no prerequisite for a group's association to, or engagement in, an abusive incident. The levels of abuse identified in the files suggest a network of young people, broader than those engaged in criminal activity, were exposed to harm and felt unsafe on an ongoing basis. The routine, and extent, of abusive behaviours in peer groups suggest that young people in the files were symbolically violent – fulfilling the need for self-protection in unsafe spaces despite the

fact that those who were displaying abusive behaviours were harming themselves, and others, in the process.

As indicated previously, young people's intimate relationships were also intertwined with their peer groups, and developed in the hegemonically masculine, heteronormative context outlined in this sub-section. The nature of these relationships will now be explored before the gender norms which underpinned them are given further consideration.

### **10.5 Intimate relationship abuse**

65% of the young people who were recorded as being in intimate relationships in the case files were under the age of 16 and close to half (45%) were under 15 years of age. In keeping with Barter, et al's 2009 critique of US 'dating violence' literature (rehearsed in chapter two), the qualitative nature of these relationships was different to that which would be expected for adult relationships, primarily taking place within public, often peer, rather than private, contexts. Many were some of the first intimate relationships experienced by the young people across the cases, and did not involve child-rearing or co-habitation (bar one relationship). Instead young people spent time with partners at school/college and within their local neighbourhood and peer group. Relationships were also relatively short, with all but one recorded as lasting no more than six months. As such, intimate relationships formed part of the peer groups in the case files and need to be considered in that context.

The nature of young people's intimate relationships was recorded across seven of the nine files, accounting for 34% of all young people under analysis. All were presented as heterosexual and 67% featured some 'harmful' characteristics<sup>31</sup> distributed across cases as listed in Table 18.

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<sup>31</sup> 33% were recorded as supportive/positive and will be explored in sub-section 10.7.

**Table 18 Frequency of young people in harmful relationships by case**

		Young People in 'harmful' relationship			
		Yes (n)	Yes (%)	No (n)	No (%)
<b>Case ID</b>	<b>1 (Rape)</b>	4	8.2	2	4.1
	<b>2 (Rape)</b>	0	0	1	2.0
	<b>4 (Rape)</b>	2	4.1	2	4.1
	<b>5 (Rape)</b>	3	6.1	0	0
	<b>7 (Murder)</b>	2	4.1	9	18.4
	<b>8 (Murder)</b>	15	31.6	2	4.1
	<b>9 (Murder)</b>	7	14.3	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	33	67.3	16	32.7

This equates to close to one in three (29%) of all young people across the files being in 'harmful' relationships, a figure in keeping with broader research into teenage relationship abuse (chapter two). Harmful relationships were experienced by complainants (n=3), suspects (n=14), witnesses (n=8) and those recorded as other (n=8).

Drawing upon the definition of peer-on-peer abuse being utilised for this study, when young people were recorded as being in harmful relationships at least: 76% involved physical abuse; 64% featured sexual abuse; and 40% were financially coercive<sup>32</sup>. Emotional abuse featured in all harmful relationships, underpinning and sustaining other forms of violence, as well as occurring as a form of abuse on its own. There are two key themes about the nature of teenage relationship abuse in the files that require specific attention.

Firstly, in keeping with the conclusions of some teenage relationship abuse scholars (i.e. Barter, et al., 2009; Connolly, et al. 2000), relationship abuse in the case files was a gendered phenomenon. 88% of those who were harmed in their relationships were young women, and where young women were identified as being in a harmful relationship they were always experiencing harm in that context . This differed for young men, some of

<sup>32</sup> Financial abuse, while in the definition of peer-on-peer abuse, is only explicitly found with reference to intimate relationships – matter which is explored later in this chapter.



whom were emotionally abused but who also instigated the emotional, sexual, physical and financial abuse of their partners (Table 47).

Of the sexually abusive relationships identified across five case files (three rape and two murder files), and physically abusive relationships featured in six cases (three murder cases and three rape cases), young women were consistently those being harmed by young men. The qualitative accounts of the abuse demonstrate how sexual abuse occurred across a continuum (as suggested by Kelly, 1987). A sense of entitlement amongst some young men is implied as is a pursuit of power and control:

6B6 accused of kicking a female in the back after she refused his advances... (and in the same year) accused of attempting to rape a 16 year old (his girlfriend at the time), and digitally penetrating (her) in the process. (Case 6, rape)

In a conversation with 1B6, [1B6 girlfriend] also states that another man likes her. 1B6 replies by saying 'don't make me come there and beat the colour out of hes [sic] skin.' (Case 1, rape)

Secondly, and associated, the physical, emotional, financial, and to a lesser extent sexual abuse within intimate relationships featured in the case files occurred in front of, or at least in the knowledge of, peers. Unlike Hearn's separation of the private abuse of women by men from their public relations with other men, young men used intimate partner violence to publically regulate relations between them and their male peers, as well as between them and their partner. Similar to accounts of MPR examined in chapter two and the nine abusive incidents in question, relationship abuse in the case files served a social purpose and acted as a means by which some young men could 'prove' themselves in front of others. Sometimes young people were in their friends' company when they were abused:

1B1 had been in a relationship with 1G5. 1G1, 1G2 and 1G5 went to visit him one day and 1B1 confronted 1G5 as to why she had ended their relationship – he had a knife with him. (Case 1, rape)

On other occasions, peers disclosed what was happening to, or involved, their friends in disputes over social media:

8G1 asked 8G2 to contact 8B1 and break up with him for her. Then 88G1 phoned 8G2 to say that she had broken up with him herself and that 8B1 was blackmailing her and telling her that he was going to tell her mum that she was spending time with boys. (Case 8. murder)

The nature of the physical abuse, including hitting young women in the face as well as in public, meant that peers could see the injuries sustained during assaults:

During an argument with an ex-partner, he [9B4] punched her in the head and threw a lighter in her face. (Case 9, murder)

The public nature of intimate partner abuse created an opportunity for reflexive interplay between relationship abuse and peer group abuse. Each mutually reinforced, and reproduced the harmful, gendered social rules of one another, entrenching hegemonically masculine relations.

Although in two cases (8 and 9) an abusive relationship was the central feature of the abusive incident in question, the majority of these accounts were found in cases where young people who were part of an abusive peer group, who ultimately killed or raped one of their peers, were also in abusive relationships (five cases). Broader harm within peer groups set the stage (Connolly, et al., 2000) for relationship-based abuse to develop. Simultaneously, the explicit and public presence of relationship abuse within peer groups contributed to peers sustaining harmful ideas about gender, relationships, consent and power, as reflected in this conversation by an abusive peer group:

'i saw your wifey g'  
'nooooo dnt even say GX'  
'u dash that'  
'yh'  
'shes jus jezzin to bare heads n i dnt lyk it'  
'bare gurls wana bang her up 4 wt shes sayin about me'....  
'oh yh nd 2moz im goin manor park yh yh 2 fuk 2 gashes well go 2  
der yard but me nd rusty are gone fuk dem nicely'  
'i dnt care im gona doggy dem both.'  
(Case 1, social media conversation about young women between the  
peer group)

In such contexts both young people's relationships and their peer groups reinforced rather than challenged the norms underpinning the abusive incidents, restricting the space for alternative action. Such evidence indicates that, in addition to hosting abusive relationships, peer groups articulated and embodied broader harmful gender norms across the nine files – norms that will now be examined. This process will further evidence the coercive characteristics of the majority of peer groups featured in the files, and assist in contextualising the behaviours of the young people outlined in chapter seven.

## **10.6 Harmful gender norms**

Case file data suggests that 97% of suspects and two thirds of complainants were in peer groups in which harmful gender norms and stereotypes were reproduced or introduced during the abusive period. It was within such peer environments that the abusive incidents in question occurred and harmful relationships, explored in the previous sub-section, were formed.

The presence of harmful gender norms was evidenced in two distinct ways. In some instances peer groups failed to offer an alternative script to the hegemonically masculine one that they were experiencing. On other

occasions files recorded evidence of peer groups that actively reproduced norms which promoted hegemonically masculine gender relations.

Peer groups that failed to challenge harmful norms contributed to a context that was conducive to abusive behaviours. For example, peers of the complainant in Case 6 were not physically, emotionally, or sexually abusive, and did not engage in criminal activity. However, they subscribed to gender stereotypes. When the complainant sought advice from friends they told her to ignore the person who had sexually harassed her rather than get support. According to her peers this was just what boys did, particularly this boy, and he usually got bored of girls who said no to him. This response did not cause of the rape the complainant later experienced, yet the norms that her peers employed contributed to the harmful context within which that rape took place. Social norms within the complainant's peer group were on a continuum with those held by the suspect. Their failure to offer an alternative social script meant that they didn't disrupt or seek to change/challenge the gendered social rules which underpinned the suspect's behaviour. Instead, they indicated a resolve that sexual harassment was part of their social field and was best navigated through avoidance until it ceased, rather than challenged it. Rather than instigate social change, they reproduced a hegemonically masculine space, echoing the pessimistic, rather than deterministic, train of Bourdieusian social theory.

On other occasions the reproduction of gender norms, and the associated pursuit of hegemonically masculine gender relations, appeared as part of the fabric of the abusive peer groups in question. For example, in Case 7 when young men, who were not part of a physically abusive or criminally engaged peer group, believed that they had been 'disrespected' by other young people the social rules in their peer group reinforced gendered notions about respect and masculinity. To elucidate: the young men had to address being disrespected by other young men through threats and violence in order to regain respect and power. These social rules created

a context conducive for escalating emotional and physical abuse, resulting in a murder.

The reproduction of harmful gender norms closed off routes to alternative action, for young people in the case files, and encouraged abusive behaviours. This impacted both suspects and complainants, exemplified by peers who, while being in abusive relationships themselves, blamed their friends for the violence that they experienced:

8G1 (complainant) threatened by another girl who liked B5 (suspect). She called her a 'slut' and a 'whore' and told her to stay away from B5. (Case 8)

As well as the 14% of young people in the case files who, as bystanders, encouraged harmful behaviour:

[5G3] is seen on 5B8 phone being assaulted – she was being slapped around the face by boys who were shouting 'violate her'. (Case 5)

Sometimes acted as a group 'they were all telling her to strip off'. (Case 1)

Negative bystanders conformed to, and reinforced, the gendered, social rules of 'harmful' peer groups. Their presence strengthened the group's justification/motive for their abusive acts, contributing to the peer group dynamic explored in sub-section 10.3.

All of these behaviours imply that young people were motivated to abuse their peers, or not intervene when others did, as part of a pursuit of both hegemonically masculine gender relations and an age-specific need for peer group acceptance. While such a conclusion sheds some light on the somewhat superficial motives outlined in the chapter 7, it is possible that

there were other implicit motivating factors to consider. As suggested in earlier sections, and implied by the critique that human action is not universally motivated (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1995), I wonder whether for some young people a reproduction of harmful gender norms illustrated an ultimate pursuit of safety, with hegemonically masculine gender relations and peer support viewed as an intermediate goal through which cultural status, vis-à-vis capital, and safety by proxy could be achieved. This reinforces the findings on negative bystanders and young women who led abusive incidents outlined earlier in this chapter. For the young men in Case 7, or the bystanders who encouraged abuse in Cases 1 and 5, it may have been believed that should gender stereotypes not be adhered to, and peers lost, then this would have opened up those young people to future attacks.

The pursuit of safety as a possible motor of human action will be developed in future chapters. It is particularly pertinent in the case of positive bystanders: those who attempted to disrupt abuse, and achieve safety, despite challenging harmful gendered norms. Their role and impact within peer groups will now be considered.

### **10.7 Bystander interventions and protective relationships**

Attempts to shift the social rules within peer groups, and create space for alternative action, was evidenced in the files in three ways: some young people counselled their friends to seek advice and support during the escalation period; others fostered positive intimate relationships and drew upon these to actively demonstrate alternative options to their peers; whilst other young people physically intervened in abusive incidents. Each of these will be explored separately before being considered together and in relation to the harmful context in which such interventions were made.

Both suspects and complainants, who were in abusive relationships, were encouraged by their peers in some instances to leave partners and/or seek support, as exemplified in the following statement:

‘I told her to get out but she was scared. I told her to go to her year head but she was scared her parents would find out. They were not good boys.’ (Case 8, statement of a peer)

Such interventions, however, were limited to those discussions. As noted in chapter seven, peers did not reinforce these interventions by seeking support beyond the peer group field during the escalation period.

Some peers drew upon their own experiences of positive relationships to exemplify, as opposed to solely directing, alternative action. 33% of the intimate relationships identified in the files were recorded as safe. In Case 9, a bystander who was in a supportive relationship identified abuse in a suspect’s relationship and drew upon her own experience to offer advice to her peer. In these instances, young people embodied alternative social scripts, adding weight to the argument that the peer group, while ‘harmful’, did not create a determined outcome for all the young people within it. Yet the peers who embodied, and then communicated, alternative action were not successful at disrupting escalating periods of abuse within the case files. As such they demonstrated *their* ability to act differently but not necessarily the ability of the suspect or complainant to whom they were associated.

Of the 35% of young people who were bystanders to the abusive incidents in the files, two in ten were peers of suspects. In these instances young men and young women attempted to alter behaviours within the social field of which they were a part, illustrated in the following three excerpts:

(1B10) arrived (having heard that a girl was having sex with some boys he knew) and when he realised that she was not consenting he

challenged the behaviour of the group and helped her to escape.  
(Case 1)

3G2 and 3G3 came in. 3G3 told 3G14 to leave it 'allow it' but 3G14 continued to tell 3G1 to do things. (Case 3)

5B13 attempted to rape G1 but she fought off and ran away leaving her phone with 5B13. She bumped into another boy (5B14) that she knew and told him that 5B13 had her phone. 5B14 challenged 5B13 to give the phone back to 5G1 which he did. (Case 5)

There is no evidence in any of these cases to suggest that positive bystanders were motivated by a pursuit of hegemonic masculinity. In these instances young people compromised their own status in order to realise the safety of others. Despite abuse within the peer group field not all young people within it were constrained to the extent that agency could not be exercised and norms challenged. It was possible for some social agents to perceive of alternative acts within a 'harmful' field. The limitation of the challenges in these cases was that they did not prevent the ultimate rape or murder of a young person, albeit that in Case 1 the rape ceased at the point of a young man's intervention.

Examples of bystander interventions, peer counsel, and positive relationships, all evidence the plural social scripts operating within the fields in the case files. They also demonstrate attempts by young people to safeguard their peers, arguably motivated by a pursuit of safety as opposed to status. However, the evidence suggests that, like parents, young people's capacity to protect their peers in the files was limited. Unlike parents however, there is no evidence that these young people sought help beyond the peer group. If they had done so, their attempts at disruption may have been more fruitful. The interplay between peer groups



and other social fields in the case files requires consideration, to develop this idea.

## 10.8 Interplay between the peer group and other social fields

The previous sub-section illustrated that some bystanders within the files formed positive relationships or challenged their peers during escalation – but it didn't explain why within peer groups:

- interventions occurred
- interventions had limited impact
- the roles of leaders and followers emerged.

This sub-section will consider whether the interplay between peer groups and other social fields can provide an explanation.

As eluded to in chapter nine, of the young people for whom data is available (n=68), a greater percentage of those who led abusive incidents were recorded as living in 'harmful' homes, and in these instances were more likely to be exposed to domestic abuse and child protection issues than their counterparts (Table 19). Followers and bystanders also experienced harm in the home but not to the same extent, and issues with parental capacity to safeguard were more readily identified for leaders and followers than for bystanders:

**Table 19 Percentages of young people experiencing abuse within the home by peer group roles**

Abuse Type	% Role during the offence			
	Leader (n=20)	Follower (n=52)	Bystander+ (n=31)	Bystander- (n=20)
Domestic Abuse	40.0	15.4	12.9	5.0
Child Protection	40.0	19.3	12.9	10.0
Capacity to parent	75.0	40.4	19.4	10.0

While these findings do not explain the difference between positive and negative bystanders, they do demonstrate differences between those who led the abusive incidents and others in their peer groups. As hypothesised in chapter nine, it seems that while the peer group clearly compromised some parental, and peer, capacity to safeguard young people in the case files it was also informed by exposure to harm within the home. Young people in supportive homes seemed less likely to be drawn directly into abusive behaviours although they stood on the sidelines. These hypotheses will be considered in discussion chapters, and require further investigation. However they do indicate a potential relationship between harmful, gendered social rules in the homes, embodied through domestic abuse, and harmful gendered rules of peer groups led by individuals through their primary participation in the abuse of their peers and the direction of others to follow suit.

In the absence of any clear correlation between the home and the peer group, attention focuses back on individual agency and other social fields. In the interplay between individuals and social fields, social action occurs, some of which reinforces and some of which challenges the status quo. This thesis is yet to consider the role of the school or neighbourhood field in the multi-directional interplay that occurs in the case files, and as such, at this stage conclusions cannot be reached.

The evidence thus far has indicated that arguably those who led had greatest power to affect change in their peer group, but as a cohort appeared most vulnerable at home. Conversely bystanders may have been more powerful at home but this sense of safety did not necessarily transmit to their peer groups. In considering agency it is important not to forget the differential influence of group power, norms, and interactions on individual decision making. The coercive nature of the peer group environment depicted in Figure 6 illustrates how for some young people acting in a way that contravenes group norms may appear to be a

theoretical and practical impossibility. This association chart illustrates the broad reach of the peer group and the dynamic way in which it interacted with the complainant. Any consideration of social field interplay needs to hold such environments in mind – how would a home interact with, and challenge, the group depicted in Figure 6? This coercive environment was one in which a complainant stated that she ‘didn’t have a choice’ (Case 4, complainant statement) as the peer group socially constructed the boundaries of consent, and therefore arguably culpability, as first alluded to in sub-section 10.3 of this chapter. Arguably, if fields external to the peer group, such as schools and/or homes, could engage with the generative capacity of bystander habitus, the gendered norms and parameters of consent set by the peer group, and the individuals within it, could be challenged. Were this to be possible social change, along with an alternative outcome, could be envisaged.

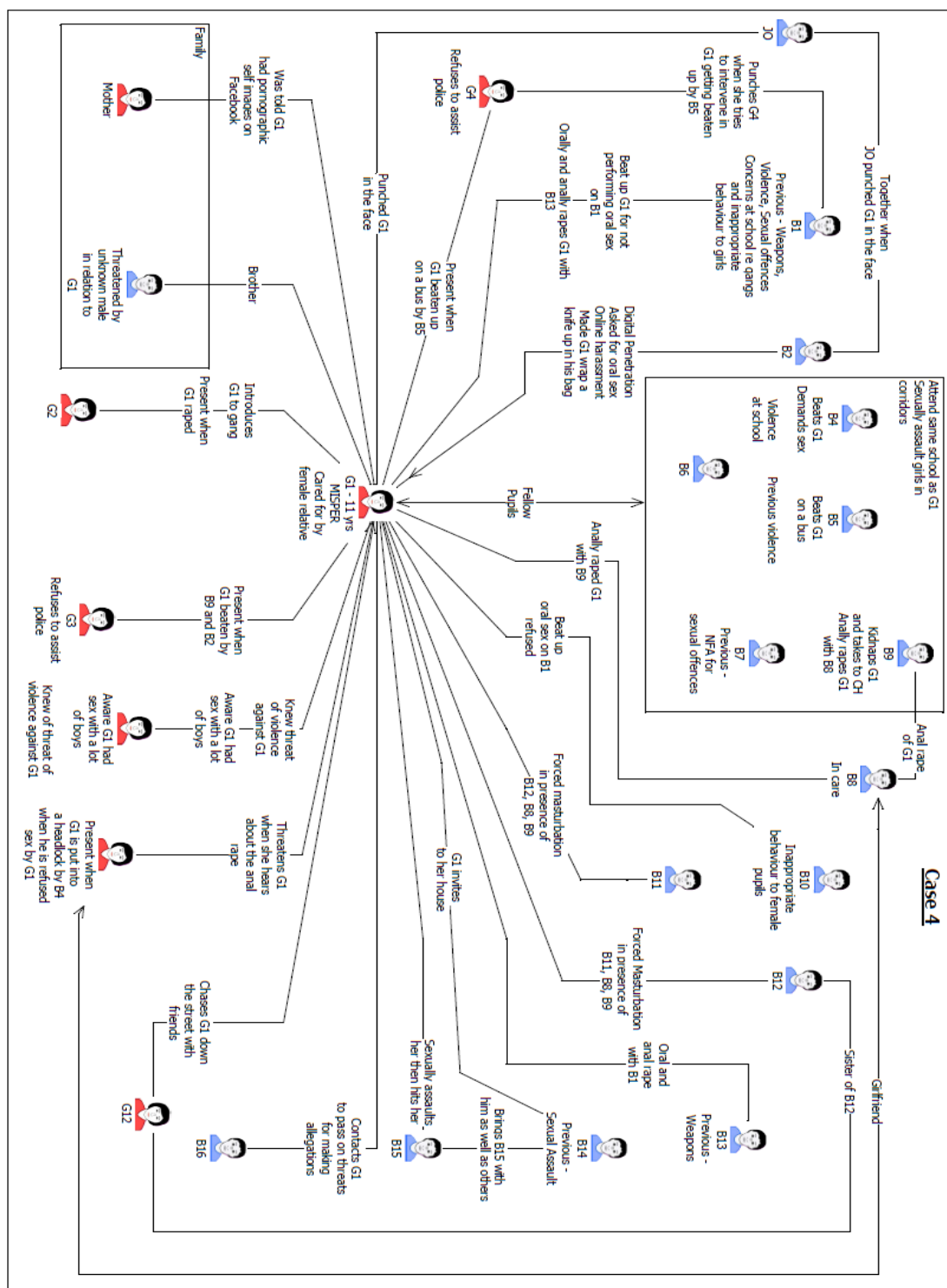


Figure 6 Coercive peer group featuring physical, sexual and emotional abuse

### **10.9 Summary findings and discussion: the social field of the peer group**

This chapter has outlined findings on the 21 peer groups featured across the nine cases in which the abusive incidents occurred. It demonstrated that:

1. The peer group was the social field where harm was most consistently identified in the case files.
2. Peer groups were associated to, hosted, facilitated or sustained, the abusive incidents under investigation in all nine cases.
3. During the abusive periods, peer group dynamics of leaders, followers and bystanders, informed the gendered rules of the social field and set parameters of culpability and consent for those involved.
4. Physical and emotional abuse, and to a lesser extent sexual abuse, were part of the fabric of most suspect peer groups prior to the abusive incident; qualitative accounts suggest that such behaviour was entrenched in these fields.
5. The peer group provided an audience for, predominantly, young men to pursue hegemonically masculine gender relations, evidenced in the fluid, rather than a static, manner in which followers temporarily assumed leadership roles.
6. Likewise, in hosting one another's intimate relationships the public nature of relationship abuse was a means by which power could be performed, and hegemonically masculine relations pursued.
7. The nature of abuse within young people's intimate relationship suggests that this was a gendered phenomenon.
8. Harmful gender norms were embodied and reproduced in 97% of the peer groups in the files, creating contexts conducive with the abusive incidents and restricting the spaces in which complainants and suspects could embody alternative action.

9. Despite the reflexive and reinforcing embodiments of harmful intimate relationships and harmful gender norms peer groups, some young people acted alternatively and/or fostered positive relationships *within* the field of the peer group. However their attempts to disrupt abuse were unsuccessful.
10. The interplay between the peer group and home reinforces the suggestion in chapter nine that the home informed the peer group through individuals who led, and that peer groups impacted upon the family through followers. However at this stage differential bystander action cannot be explained.
11. Arguably the fact that young people in the case files managed risk within the peer group rather than engaging with external fields limited the extent to which the rules of the group could change.
12. It is possible that a pursuit of safety, via hegemonically masculine gender relations, could be the unifying motor for all social agents - some challenging within the social field, and others conforming to the rules of the field, but none initiating interplay with contravening fields.

In addition to suggesting more about the generative capacity of habitus and young people's engagement in symbolic violence, findings on the nature of featured peer groups further contextualises the abusive behaviours outlined in chapter seven. The peer group acted as a locus of hegemonically masculine relations across the nine case files, hosting some of the abusive incidents and providing an audience for them all.

In addition to evidencing the gendered contexts in which abuse occurred, the influence of the peer group for young people looms large in this chapter, re-asserting the age-specific characteristics of the incidents under examination. The majority of individuals in the files adopted the abusive rules of the peer group, with varying extents of willing, and embodied them through their behaviour. Those who led played some role in establishing social rules for the abusive incident, often through participation as well as

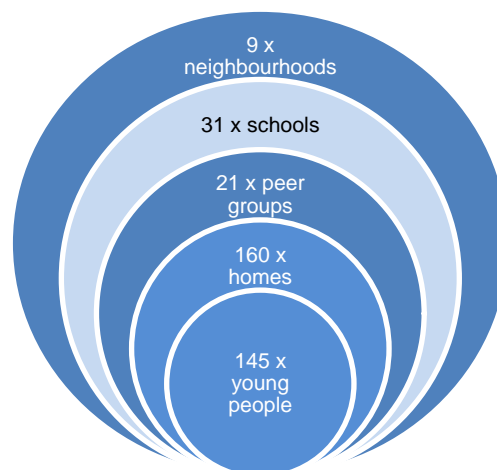
linguistic direction. Running alongside this, however, was endorsement through the behaviour of followers and the support of bystanders which reinforced and reproduced the social rules underpinning the abuse. Young people acknowledged these rules when they identified a lack of choice: verbally articulated, for example, by a complainant in Case 4 and a suspect who took part in a murder in Case 9. As a judge summed up in Case 7, 'you wouldn't have done this if you were on your own'.

Yet evidence of bystander interventions, and parental attempts to safeguard, indicate that these behaviours were far from determined. Consideration of the school, as a protective site in which young people could be supported to challenge harmful social norms, may provide further insight into the limitations of alternative action in the nine cases under examination. As an environment upon which young people are dependent for their development and safety, its nature may have influenced the parameters of choice experienced by young people in the files.

## 11. Findings: the social field of the school

### 11.1 Introduction

Peer-on-peer abuse literature examined in chapter two and the theoretical framework developed in chapter three, identified school as a site upon which young people are dependent for their development and safety. 31 schools featured across the nine cases in this study.



This chapter will consider the extent to which school environments protected young people from, or exposed them to, the harm associated to the abusive incidents in the case files, the latter being referred to as 'harmful' for the purposes of this thesis. Harm and protection in featured schools will be explored with reference to:

- abusive behaviours between students
- gender norms within school cultures
- the school's capacity to safeguard students
- the interplay between the school and other social fields featured in my study.

In order to assess their capacity to safeguard, this chapter makes partial reference to the way schools responded to the abusive incidents in question (further explored in chapter 14). However, the ways that schools engaged with students generally, and during periods of escalation specifically, are of greater importance here. By challenging the social rules



underpinning the abusive incidents in question, schools could have offered bystanders, complainants, and arguably suspects, a safe route to could to disrupt escalation.

## **11.2 Social field of the school – an overview**

Evidence suggests that, following peer groups, schools were the second most consistently harmful site in the case files. Harm within schools were identified in eight out of nine cases (five rape cases and all three murder cases), impacting 91% of young people in the files. The case that did not feature 'harmful' schools involved online contact between the suspects and complainant – their schools were not directly implicated in the abusive incident or escalation period.

In six cases (two murders, four rapes) all, or part, of the abusive incident in question occurred within the school environment. In:

- Cases 3 and 6 (both rape cases), young women were raped on school property
- Case 7 (murder) suspects were recruited in school
- Case 8 (murder) bystanders were physically assaulted in school for providing evidence on the case, as were complainants in Cases 3, 4 and 5 (all rape cases)
- Cases 4 and 5 (rape cases) young women were groomed into abusive peer groups through associations in school.

In the remaining two cases where harm was identified in the school environment, but the abusive incident did not occur, young people experienced behaviours in school which contributed to how they understood relationships, friendships and safety. For example: in five rape cases and in murder Case 9 suspects were physically assaulted by peers in school; for some suspects this was their first experience of abuse.

By hosting abusive peer groups and, to a lesser extent, the abusive incidents, case file evidence suggests that the majority of featured schools

were environments that complimented rather than challenged the gendered norms underpinning the offences in question. However, assessing the extent to which this is accurate requires a more detailed consideration of harmful behaviour amongst students, gender norms within school cultures, and the school's capacity to safeguard. An assessment of all these factors, and the interplay between schools and other social fields, will evidence whether schools were party to setting gendered hierarchies and the parameters of consent in which the abusive incidents occurred.

### **11.3 Abusive behaviours in school**

Schools were recorded as being sites of abusive behaviours. Eight out of the nine cases featured schools where young people were physically abused by their peers. Of the 145 young people in the case files, there is evidence that 69% of them were exposed to physical violence in school. In five cases, this violence occurred during the escalation towards the abusive incident in question.

Young people were exposed to harmful sexual behaviours in schools in six out of the nine cases (five rapes, one murder), impacting 47% of young people in this study in varied ways, prior, during, and following the abusive incidents under examination. Prior to nine offences in question, files documented inter-student sexual harassment within schools of four rape complainants, exemplified in the following exert:

4B5 and 4B7 used to touch 4G1 regularly during the day as they were all attending the same school.... The boys would also grab the girls in the corridors and simulate the 'dagging' dance move on them. (Sexual harassment of students in school of complainant 4G1 Case 4)

In five of the six rape cases, suspects were recorded as sexually harassing other young people in school prior to assaulting the complainants in question

On record as having told a girl 'I will rape you', forced the head of another girl towards his groin area, and another allegation of indecent exposure. (Case 3)

School records note that 6B1 was accused on multiple occasions of sexual harassment spanning two years. (Case 6)

At least 47% of suspects had committed offences in school prior to the abusive incident, including violence against other pupils, criminal damage and harmful sexual behaviour. These behaviours were largely managed within the school environment, and without the engagement of external agencies.

Such evidence suggests that, as with some peer groups, abusive behaviours between students were entrenched in some schools featured in the files. Young men displayed sexually harmful behaviours within schools for years prior to the abusive incidents, implying missed opportunities to disrupt their habitus and enable it to engage in alternative action (considered in detail in chapter 14). For some complainants, school was a site in which they witnessed the physical and sexual abuse of their peers. The abusive behaviours identified within schools were also gendered: young men were physically abusive towards one another, and their female peers creating and sustaining hegemonically masculine gendered relations between young men and between young men and young women in the process. On all these counts, schools incubated 'harmful' peer groups in which the abusive incidents later occurred and contributed to climates in which the gendered parameters of consent were particularly restrictive.

Despite this evidence, social norms within schools could have condoned or challenged abusive behaviours, and in doing so supported young people to act differently - it is these that will now be considered.

#### **11.4 Gender norms and bullying**

Rather than challenge the abusive behaviours outlined above, case files evidenced the broader reproduction of abusive, gendered social rules amongst the staff and student populations within featured schools. Bullying cultures, inter-student emotional abuse, and hegemonically masculine hierarchies in some school environments meant that incidents of physical and sexual abuse did not occur in a vacuum.

92% of those harmed in school environments, not necessarily in the context of the abusive incident, experienced, used, or were exposed to, emotional abuse and bullying behaviours in school, which in turn reconstructed hegemonically masculine gender relations between students. Suspects were recorded as having been emotionally abused by peers in school prior to the abusive incidents in question. In seven cases suspects, predominantly young men, were threatened by older students within school during their first year. Some of these young men reported that these early experiences of victimisation informed their use of weapons and violence as a means of self-protection.

It was on a continuum of bullying that a young woman was raped, on school property, in Case 3. The lead suspect, also a young woman, was described as a bully by other students in the school, who 'if she doesn't get what she wants she starts on them'. The impact of this bullying dynamic was so far-reaching that following the abusive incident other students, not initially associated to the rape, threatened the complainant on the suspect's behalf, including the Head Girl of the student body.

In keeping with suggestions in previous chapters, such bystander intervention may have been motivated by a pursuit of safety in schools where bullying cultures were pervasive. In this case, the influence of the home was integral to the creation of these school-based social rules: the father of the lead suspect had an extensive criminal history and violent reputation that was used by her to exert power in the school environment, and as a result secure her own safety and status.

Student responses to abusive incidents reproduced gender hierarchies and harmful norms in schools across eight cases. At least 75% of young people in the files were attending schools where stereotypical gender ideals were reinforced by the behaviour and attitudes of staff and/or students. Following two cases of rape on school premises, and another linked to a school-based peer group, other pupils approached complainants, either to ask to them to engage in sexual activity (exert 1) or to blame them for what had happened (exert 2):

After a few minutes he stopped and left 6G1 there. She put her clothes back on and went to join her friends. Later that day boys in the school started shouting 'sket' at her. (Case 6)

'Tell ur pakie friend wats her face G1 shes a dead girl'

'What she done now lol'

'If i get shift im tellin u im shanking her up...if i get shift i'm shanking the bitch'

'Dats fucked buh i dnt care neway do wteva init shes been jazzin behind ma bk. U gna kill her'

'4 real im not lien blud wen i see her im intending to kill'. (Case 1, social media conversation between a suspect and a peer at school)

The student attitudes displayed above were compounded by staff practices that minimised instances of sexual bullying and engaged in

victim blaming. The following exert indicates a lack of urgency amongst staff members who focused on the behaviour of female complainants rather than suspects when seeking to manage harmful behaviours:

School stated that [5G1 aged 12] was 'getting into lots of arguments at school, people calling her names and spreading rumours'. 'Some of the boys were boasting that they had sex with her'. Emails state that she had a behaviour mentor in school due to '**her** attitude, behaviour, and acting out in school'. (Case 5, bold added by author)

Evidenced bullying and harmful gender norms contributed to school cultures in which some of the abusive incidents, the formation of implicated peer groups and the preceding physical and sexual abuse, occurred. To an extent some form of physical and emotional abuse between students is to be expected within schools. With the exception of sexually abusive and violent behaviours, these acts could be conceptualised as young people testing boundaries, learning about consequences and forming their own identities. It was not necessarily the existence of violence within featured schools that was most harmful. Rather, the ways in which schools identified, responded to, and managed these incidences, demonstrating their capacity to safeguard students, may be of greater import. If schools responded to the behaviours/attitudes outlined thus far in a way that offered challenge and safety, then alternative action may have been possible.

### **11.5 Capacity to safeguard**

Schools struggled to safeguard some of the students in their care in eight out of the nine cases, impacting 79% of the 145 young people in the case files in three ways illustrated in Figure 7.

Safety in school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Aware of harm within/external to the school as it impacts students</li> <li>✓ Identifies and responds to the harm within the school environment</li> <li>✓ Identifies and works with partners to safeguard students from harm external to the school environment</li> </ul>
Lack of safety in school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Aware of the harm within and external to the school</li> <li>➤ Identifies harm but responds inappropriately</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Unaware of the harm within and/or external to the school</li> <li>➤ Identifies and responds to behaviours that occur as a result of harm/abuse experienced by the young person (the warning signs), rather than harm/abuse itself</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Unaware of the harm within and/or external the school</li> <li>➤ Fails to identify warning signs or the abuse, and offers not response</li> </ul>

**Figure 7 Safe and unsafe school environments**

Firstly, in some instances professionals were unaware of the risks posed to and by their students. Secondly, there were occasions when professionals were aware of the abuse that had occurred but did not respond in a way that increased a sense of safety amongst students and prevented further abuse. Thirdly, there were situations in which schools were aware that something was wrong, but had not identified the abusive incident/s, responding instead to the warning signs of abuse rather than their cause. While some of these challenges are related to the way in which schools responded to the incidents in question (explored in full in chapter 14), they exemplify the extent to which this social field offered space for young people to exercise alternative action and are considered here for that purpose.

A lack of awareness about the risks posed by, and to, students in the files, impacted upon schools' ability to protect young people from harm at times when they were in their care. In Case 7 one educational establishment did

not create an environment whereby students could disclose fears and concerns. As a result bystanders were recruited into violent activity during a school day, and while a large proportion of the student body was aware of what was going to happen nobody informed a teacher. Likewise, in Case 1 the complainant was threatened in school and physically assaulted over two weeks by fellow students before the abusive incident in question. The complainant was so afraid that she moved to live with another relative during this time. The school were unaware of the abuse that she was experiencing or that she had moved as a result. In these two examples young people decided not to engage beyond the social field of their peer group, and in the latter case beyond their family, to acquire safety – a matter to be returned to later.

Case file evidence indicates that where schools were aware of the abuse that had happened, or that a situation was escalating but did not respond in a way that protected or reassured students, the harm continued or intensified. In Case 3, following the rape of a student on school property the head teacher refused to allow the police to interview other students during school time, stating that this would ‘aggravate circumstances’. This decision reduced the ability of the police and the school staff to reassure students and identify if other young people had similar experiences. The investigation was delayed and as a result, three witnesses refused to give evidence and the complainant was threatened and physically assaulted on, and just outside, the school property.

Parents also raised concerns about the safety of their young people in school when not permitting them to give evidence to the police:

Attempts to get statements from 5 young people in the school – all said they were too afraid to take part.... All were supported by their parents not to provide information as they were ‘afraid of local gangs and problems that would arise at school.’



In Cases 3 and 6, schools also failed to respond to an escalation towards the abusive incident, and ongoing sexual harassment in the school environment:

Following the witnessing of a physical assault on a female student, 6B1 is '**spoken to**' and staff note that he is 'already on a red report from the head teacher'. The girl (6G6) has informed the teacher that he had done this before and that he is in a local gang. (Case 6, bold added by author)

(Following sexual harassment of female students) He was **taken out of class and spoken to** about his behaviour. ...Staff member who witnessed this left the school due to stress the year after. (Case 3, bold added by author)

Such responses individualised the harmful behaviour without considering the broader context in which it happened and the impact that it may have had on other students. The school in Case 6 also failed to safeguard the lead suspect who was navigating harm within the home, peer group and wider neighbourhood; missing opportunities to disrupt escalation:

6B1 witnessed his friend being seriously assaulted. He discloses this to staff following an altercation in school where he is threatened that the same will happen to him. School suggest that 6B1 go home and stay there for his own safety and ask to speak with his mother but she is outside of the country. 6B1 states that his older brother is looking after him. ... The school contact his brother who says that he cannot collect 6B1. The school state that they will contact social services unless 6B1 is collected. (When) 6B1 (is collected from school by his brother) school state that they believe that 6B1 may be traumatised

by what he has witnessed (but do not take any further action, and do not inform children's social care).

As evidenced, when schools were aware of abusive incidents, and/or escalation towards abuse those at the top of the hierarchy in that field (teachers) were unable to create safety. Parents and students explicitly stated that they were unsafe and did not see the school as a protective factor. In these instances the social field of the school could not accommodate young people who were seeking an alternative outcome – it could not keep them safe.

During periods of escalation, and following incidents of abuse, there is also evidence that some schools failed to respond appropriately to warning signs displayed by young people. In three cases (two rape and one murder) schools noted that male suspects were going missing and 'sofa surfing'. However, their response to this was insufficient, arguably informed by gendered assumptions about young men not being vulnerable, and lacked any sense of urgency or referral to children's social care:

Mother of 6B1 also phoned the school to state that 6B1 left home on the Sunday afternoon after she approached him and his friends about smoking in the stairwell. 6B1 had phoned his mother each day but said he was staying with friends (while aged 15). There was a failure to ascertain what happened during that period, although some attempts (were) made by school to speak to other students to find out where 6B1 was staying. (Case 6, rape)

Following their experiences of abuse within their peer groups both in and outside of school, young women, who were complainants in three cases, became physically abusive. In all of these cases schools used punitive sanctions that blamed young women for the harm they had experienced,

moving them into other classes, and in one case using a permanent exclusion, in a manner reminiscent of the gendered social policing of women's movements and clothing to avoid rape:

Two days later 4G1 mother comes to school worried about the impact of 'family issues' of 4G1 and another boy in her year. **School moves 4G1 to another part of the school to avoid contact with the boy** ...4G1 is having 'problems' with another girl her class – **school change 4G1 timetable so that she is not in class with this girl**. In the following month 4G1 is reported to be 'abusive swearing, walked out of lessons without permission'. In the New Year logged that 4G1 has been threatened by someone from a different school...Truancy recorded in the following week and school assign a mentor to 4G1 – the following week 4G1 is recorded as making 'rude and offensive comments during mentoring time, threatening a member of staff' – **school gives a fixed term 3 day exclusion**. (Case 4) (Bold added by author)

It is important to note that in some schools, the failure to recognise warning signs and respond appropriately was not shared by all teaching staff. In Case 6 for example, one member of staff reacted punitively to the complainant's behaviour, whereas another teacher challenged this reaction and sought to understand the drivers of the behaviour:

6G1 verbally assaults a teacher and throws her folder at him. 6G1 then talks to another teacher about what happened and that teacher says that the behaviour is out of character. The teacher who was assaulted writes an email stating that:

'6G1 mother is coming into the school tomorrow and I have not been invited to attend the meeting? Why should I not be there? This is made worse by the fact that Miss X vouched for her saying that she hasn't ever done anything like this in her classes previously....I do not

think that a character is really appropriate it just undermines me. 6G1 may have never sworn (at) or assaulted Miss X before, but I have never lied in my job, in this case I have nothing to gain in doing so except more paperwork’.

Differential responses from staff members indicated an absence of a whole-school approach to safeguarding in the files. Responses from individual staff members were insufficient to change the nature of an entire social field and in this case challenge the gendered norms of both the abusive peer network and other fellow colleagues, by creating safety in the school environment. As a result young people moved schools in eight of the nine cases, including the movement of: complainants in four rape cases; suspects in five cases (three rape, one murder); and bystanders in three cases (two rape, two murder). The use of relocation will be given greater consideration when exploring professional responses to the abusive incidents (chapter 14). At this stage, school relocation and differential staff responses indicate school environments which were unable to provide both a consistent sense of safety and a challenge to harmful gender norms.

Unlike the 18% of parents who asked for help with their children, there is little evidence that schools in the files sought help prior to the abusive incident. Most schools wanted support to manage the behaviour of individual students (Cases 1 and 3), rather than to alter the school environment itself. In Case 7 one school sought assistance following an abusive incident, working with partners to address the impact of a murder on their students and improve confidence in the school’s ability to offer students protection. Such a response was absent in the other cases. Instead, abusive incidents were characterised as ‘one-offs’ and problems with individual students rather than with the school environment as a whole. This is despite the fact that, as this chapter has demonstrated, the majority of schools featured in the cases were; unable to challenge the

norms underpinning abusive incidents, struggled to safeguard those in their care, and, as such, were 'harmful' environments for the majority of young people featured in my study.

### **11.6 Interplay between schools and other social fields**

Abuse between young people in school, and an inability to respond to it, cannot be understood when viewed in isolation. As is the case with the fields of the home and the peer group, the school was impacted by, and impacted on, other social fields in the files; interplay warranting further consideration.

In all eight cases where schools struggled to safeguard their students, young people were experiencing harm elsewhere – the effects of which were brought into the school environment. For example, those who led the two rapes that transpired on school property (Cases 3 and 6) had experienced physical abuse in their home and local neighbourhood respectively and become gang-affiliated in response. Their familial and neighbourhood-based experiences transferred into the school environment and led to compliance from other young people. In Case 6, the neighbourhood-based risk and hegemonically masculine gender relations experienced by lead suspect, along with the neglect and inability to safeguard he was experiencing at home, came together in the school. School was the location in which he harmed other students. The school not only struggled to manage his behaviour, and challenge the norms that underpinned it, they also perceived themselves as unable to influence what was occurring in the neighbourhood or at home.

Similar difficulties were identified in complainant schools. In rape Cases 4 and 5, and in murder Case 8, schools were unable to manage the impact of the neighbourhood, peer groups, and home, on their students. In Case 4, for example, following being raped in the neighbourhood and peer group, the complainant became increasingly violent towards others

students. In response the school excluded the complainant, focusing solely on the impact of her behaviour on their environment, rather than seeking to address the impact of external environments on her and the school by proxy.

Yet, the school was not a docile environment that was only 'done to' by external fields. Files evidenced the existence of abusive behaviours, harmful gender norms and an inability to safeguard students, within schools associated to the abusive incidents. As a result, these schools created, reproduced, and sustained, rather than challenged, harmful gendered social norms. It is this reciprocity of harm between the school and other fields that contributed to it being the second most consistently 'harmful' environment in the nine cases.

### **11.7 Summary findings and discussion: social field of the school**

This chapter has outlined the nature of the 31 schools featured across the nine cases, finding that:

1. Schools were the second most consistently identified 'harmful' social field in the files, impacting 91% of the young people.
2. Complainants, suspects and witnesses were exposed to physical, sexual and emotional abuse within their school environments, in which hegemonic masculine gender relations were often reinforced and peer groups were formed.
3. In two of the six rape cases the abusive incident happened on school property.
4. An inability to safeguard young people from risks within and external to the school environment was identified in eight of the nine cases.
5. Schools struggled to safeguard because: they didn't identify that escalation was occurring; or they did identify the abuse but failed to

respond appropriately; or they only responded to the behaviours that happened following the abuse rather than the abuse itself.

6. In all bar one case school-based responses individualised risk and intervened with complainants and/or suspects without addressing harmfully gendered social norms that had been adopted within the broader school environment.
7. The inability of this field to safeguard was articulated by parents and students who stated that schools could keep them safe following abusive incidents.
8. Where schools identified that norms within homes and neighbourhoods may be impacting on the safety and behaviour of suspects, there is evidence that they failed to respond effectively.
9. In a similar manner to peer groups, schools sought to contain risk and abuse, rather than consider interplay between it and other fields such as the home, peer group and neighbourhood.
10. All of the aforementioned social fields impacted upon, and were impacted by, the social field of the school creating a reciprocity of harm navigated by the young people in the case files.

As outlined in the theoretical narrative upon which my study is based, schools can be sites that reproduce harmful, gendered, social norms and behaviours (Frosh, et al., 2002; Messerschmidt, 2012b; Powell 2010); such a pattern is borne out in my data. As a site upon which young people are dependent for their development, the majority of schools in the files failed to protect young people from harm, and contributed to the harmful, gendered norms that underpinned the abusive incidents in question. In eight of the nine case files, the school was a gendered and age-specific social field – reproducing, creating and/or sustaining ideas about young people and their agency, as well as gender, which were embodied and reproduced by social agents, who were their students in these cases.

Evidence on social field interplay, and its impact on the generative capacity of the habitus, has also been further developed in this chapter. While the home is also a site of dependency for young people, it is differentiated from schools in the files as it was in the latter that instances of peer-on-peer abuse were located. The school was a site of escalation in eight cases and in two cases where young people were raped. It was also a social field with reduced capacity to safeguard young people from these instances of abuse.

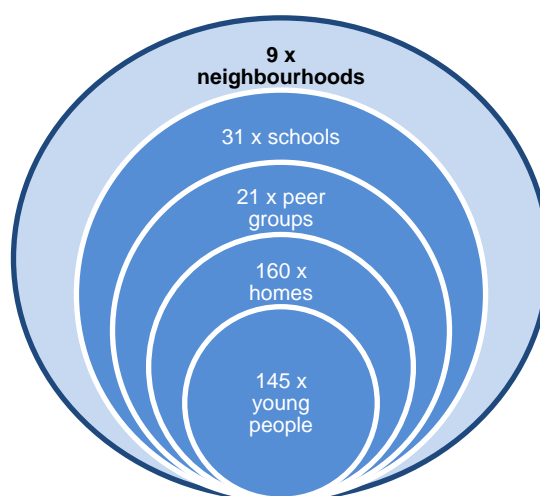
In order to develop these ideas further the following chapter considers case file evidence of the impact of the neighbourhood on all social fields explored thus far, and its relation to the abusive incidents in question. Once this field has been explored, the findings outlined will be brought together to offer a socio-cultural account of these nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse with reference to, agent/field interplay, habitus, and symbolic violence.



## 12. Findings: the social field of the neighbourhood

### 12.1 Introduction

Young people in the case files navigated nine local authorities featuring streets, parks, transport hubs, shopping centres, housing estates, and other geographical locations. In total these public locations, in which young people's homes and schools were situated and where they spent their time, are referred to as 'neighbourhoods' in this chapter.



Data presented in previous chapters suggested that the fields of the school, peer group, and home were all impacted by the norms and abusive behaviours within the neighbourhoods in the files. Literary evidence examined in chapters two, three and four, along with findings considered thus far, point to the idea that some peer groups formed in response to neighbourhood based risk; particularly, the re/construction of hegemonically masculine relations through the abuse of young men by their male peers and those slightly older than them, often although not exclusively in gang-affected neighbourhoods (Johnson, 2013; Pitts, 2008; Ralphs, Medina and Aldridge, 2009). The norms of the peer group and the neighbourhood appeared to be reproduced by young people in other social fields such as the home or school, which in turn impacted upon the capacity of those latter sites to safeguard the young people in their care.

Evidence in previous chapters also indicated that rule transference and cross-field impact did not occur in only direction. The school, the home, and arguably young people's peer groups, re-created abusive and gendered social norms that impacted upon young people's interactions with the neighbourhood. For example, young people's experiences of domestic abuse within their homes, documented in chapter nine, pushed some of them into the neighbourhood.

In order to explore this interaction in greater detail, and its relevance to the nine cases under consideration, this chapter explores young people's contact with harm within the neighbourhood in general, their exposure and experience of abusive behaviours more specifically, as well as experiences of safety and fear within this social field. Following which, this chapter returns to the interaction between neighbourhoods and the other fields in my study in order to ascertain the relevance of the neighbourhood to the abusive incidents in question.

## **12.2 The social field of the neighbourhood – an overview**

In total, 86% of the young people across the nine cases experienced or were exposed to harm (abusive behaviours and/or compromised safety) within the neighbourhoods that they lived, prior to, during, and following the abusive incident (n=124): neighbourhoods referred to as 'harmful' for the purposes of this thesis. As a result, evidence suggests that the social field of the neighbourhood was the third most consistently 'harmful' environment identified within the case files.

Of those young people in the case files who experienced or were exposed to harm in neighbourhood:

- 7% were complainants (representing all bar one complainant)
- 46% were suspects (representing 75% of the suspect cohort)

- 36% were witnesses (accounting for all witnesses)
- 11% were those categorised as ‘other’ (accounting for all bar one of this cohort).

Exposure to neighbourhood-based harm was more widespread across witnesses, complainants, and ‘others’, than it was for suspects, even though the latter group made up the largest proportion of those for whom the neighbourhood was harmful. In order to understand this pattern in greater detail the nature of the harm experienced by each cohort will now be considered: firstly with an exploration of abusive behaviours in the field, and secondly with reference to their experiences of fear and safety.

### **12.3 Abusive behaviours in the neighbourhood**

In the nine neighbourhoods under consideration:

- at least 56% of young people experienced or were exposed to physical abuse
- sexual abuse was a feature for 42% of young people
- crime was a feature for 85% of young people.

Unlike the fields of the school, peer group, and home, criminal activity was the most, rather than least, consistent harmful feature of the nine neighbourhoods – a finding to be considered later in this sub-section, as it is a characteristic of varying significance for different cohorts of young people in the files. Complainants, suspects, witnesses, and ‘others’, experienced neighbourhood based harm in qualitatively different ways.

For suspects who were harmed in the neighbourhood their relationship with this field involved a significant amount of criminal activity and violence:

- 95% experienced or were exposed to physical harm

- for 84% sexual harm also featured in their neighbourhood experiences
- all suspects who were living in 'harmful' neighbourhoods came into contact with criminal activity in that field.

For young men in particular, neighbourhood-based physical abuse and threats to personal safety were features of their lives prior to their abuse of others, and at a greater rate than violence within their homes. For example in Case 2, all three suspects experienced physical violence and threats from other young men in their local neighbourhood, prior to the abusive incident. Whereas only two were recorded as experiencing harm in the home, the nature of which was a lack of capacity to parent – as opposed to physical abuse:

2B3 was stood at a bus stop when he was approached by a group of 20 males. They showed him a picture of his (social media) page and stated that they knew he was from another area. One of the males took a knife from his back pocket and put it up his sleeve. Another male also had a knife. 2B3 ran from the stop into a shop and was chased by the group who then waited for him outside. (Case 2, rape)

The same pattern applied to Case 8. A young man, who was the lead suspect in the murder a young woman who was his ex-girlfriend, had been repeatedly victimised in his local neighbourhood in the years preceding his own abusive behaviour, although investigations failed to source any evidence of him being exposed to harm at home:

(8B1 was) surrounded by a group of males and had his bag poked by a sharp implement. He was patted down and slapped around the head. (On another occasion) searched by a lone male and had his phone taken.

Table 20 illustrates that experiences of harm within the local neighbourhood were particularly pronounced for young people who were suspects identified as being gang-associated:

**Table 20 Young people exposed to harm in neighbourhoods by gang association**

		<b>Gang-associated</b>	<b>Not gang-associated</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Exposed to harm in neighbourhood</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	50	6	56
	<b>% within young people exposed to harm in neighbourhoods</b>	89.3	10.7	100.0
	<b>% within gang association individuals</b>	100.0	24.0	74.7
	<b>% of total</b>	66.7	8.0	74.7

While unsurprising, given that young people join gangs in response to neighbourhood based risk and violence (Catch 22, 2013; Firmin, 2008; Pitts, 2008), this finding is an important factor to note, further demonstrating the harm experienced by suspects, particularly those who were gang-associated, prior to the incidents under investigation. In all cases such harm re/constructed hegemonically masculine relations between young men whose use of physical violence elevated status and secured different levels of 'safety'.

While suspects were differentially exposed to harm within the home, the risk that they faced in the neighbourhood was far more consistent, compromising their safety from a young age in the files. Reflecting on the association between pre-victimisation and the committing of abusive acts, documented in the literature chapters of this thesis, it is arguably the victimisation of young men within neighbourhoods as opposed to the home which is of greatest importance to my study. Whereas suspects who were young women, particularly those who led abusive incidents, were harmed within familial and intimate relationship settings in the years prior to them abusing their peers.

The pattern of neighbourhood victimisation was different for complainants. It was during and following the abusive incidents that the neighbourhood was particularly unsafe for the complainants, rather than before the incident/s occurred. This was particularly true for young women, whereas the two male complainants had been exposed to, or experienced, harm in their local neighbourhood prior to the abusive incident in the patterns outlined above. In six cases, part or all of the abusive incidents happened in public parts of the neighbourhood (four rapes and two murders). In five cases, complainants, who were all young women, experienced neighbourhood-based harm that was initially intertwined with the abusive incident in question, as demonstrated in the following extracts:

1G1 (complainant) did not like 1B1 (suspect) and told her friend (1G0). (Three weeks prior to the offence) 1G0 told 1B1 and he threatened 1G1 over the phone and made threats to 1G1 when he saw her on the street. (Case1, rape)

(4G1 (complainant) was) at a bus stop with a friend when 4B9 and 4B2 (suspects) saw her. Both boys slapped her....When she tried to leave 4G1 punched her in the face and told her 'if you come around here then you have to do things for us'. 4B2 took her into someone's garden nearby where he digitally penetrated her stating 'do you want to come to (the local area) or not'. (Case 4, rape)

Likewise, witnesses and others experienced harm in the neighbourhood post, rather than during or prior to, the abusive incidents in question, in the form of threats and retaliation.

Such patterns suggest gendered interaction between social agents and neighbourhoods as recorded in nine cases. For young men, neighbourhood-based harm existed independently of the incident in

question re/establishing hierarchies between them and senses of safety by proxy. Whereas young women's experiences of neighbourhood-based harm were interwoven with the incident in question and provided a means by which suspects could publically assert power, and pursue hegemonically masculine status, as outlined in chapter 10.

This finding provides some explanation for the differential experiences of suspects to other cohorts in my study. While all bar one complainant experienced harm in the neighbourhood, the majority were young women and these experiences were linked to the offence under investigation. Whereas for suspects, neighbourhood-based abuse was enduring, the rules of which were embodied and reconstructed during the incidents in question. It is in this escalating context that young women were raped or murdered during the abusive incidents in question; prior to this most had not been harmed in neighbourhoods in a way that was comparable to suspects or male complainants.

#### **12.4 Safety and fear in the neighbourhood**

Of those young people who experienced harm in the neighbourhood, case file evidence suggested that 60% had their safety compromised and 42% showed signs that they were fearful within that social field.

Neighbourhood-associated fear was a particular feature in the lives of complainants, witnesses, and others *following* abusive incidents. Even in cases where the abuse itself did not take place within the neighbourhood, threats that persisted led to the relocation of young people (and where possible their families). Half of the complainants (excluding murder cases) were relocated, in addition to at least 13% of witnesses and 20% of the other young people who were affected within the case files.

As explored in the literature chapters, a pursuit of physical safety (Shuker, 2013) is often the motive for relocation, and was evidenced in the case

files when professionals, parents, and/or the young person themselves considered their neighbourhood too unsafe to live in:

‘I know most of the boys arrested in connection with this offence and if it became public knowledge that I have assisted police and provided evidence against them I would be subjected to serious violence before or after the trial...I am aware that some, especially 1B2, uses violence against people on a regular basis....I would fear for my safety, my family’s safety and our property’. (Case 1, view of bystander who intervened)

Moving the whole family is a matter of urgency: ‘a move must be facilitated so that the family can leave (the local area) and avoid all possible threats and recriminations’. (Case 4, view of professionals)

A belief, in the case files, that safety in the neighbourhood could not be achieved was hardly surprising given the accounts of physical, emotional and sexual abuse that occurred in that field prior to and during the abusive incidents in question. Furthermore, despite the use of relocation, current data on the neighbourhoods indicates that physical and sexual abuse persisted within those local areas. For example, according to police data neighbourhood locations in which the rapes occurred in Case 4 remained ‘sexual violence hotspots’ three years after the incident in question. In Case 1 the estate on which the rape occurred (and adults walked past without intervening) continues to be a location where peer-on-peer abuse happens five years later.

Given the exposure of suspects to harm within the neighbourhood it is interesting to note that relocation was reserved, in the main, for complainants. While few suspects were relocated, nearly all who were exposed to harm in the neighbourhood were documented as feeling unsafe (95%) or having their safety compromised (96%) in their local area.



Evidence of male suspects being abused in the local neighbourhood and then embodying the rules of that neighbourhood to abuse others, while still being afraid themselves, indicates their engagement in symbolic violence in the nine cases. Arguably, in the absence of relocation or a change in the social conditions of the neighbourhoods, suspects acted in ways to ensure their status within hegemonically masculine hierarchies, and therefore realise 'safety', through the continual harm of others in their local area; even if arguably this safety wasn't realised.

### **12.5 Interplay between the neighbourhood and other social fields**

It appears, therefore, that while neighbourhood-based harm influenced the escalatory context for the abusive incidents other fields may have been more central to the rape/murder under investigation. For example, in Cases 3, 6, and 9, the school and peer group were more directly implicated in the abusive incident. However, in the same three cases all of the male suspects had been harmed in the neighbourhood prior to the abusive incidents in question. Their exposure to physical abuse in the neighbourhood informed their individual identities and the norms within their peer groups, which valued abusive behaviours and the pursuit of hegemonically masculine status to assert authority and achieve local safety – this in turn impacted upon the complainant at the point of the abusive incident. The nature of the interplay between the neighbourhood and male suspects suggests that even if the neighbourhood was not directly implicated in the abusive incident it was still relevant to establishing the social rules that informed their abusive behaviours. Furthermore, some of the suspects had experienced abuse in the home (as evidenced in chapter nine), pushing them into the neighbourhood where they were missing for extensive periods of time.

Such examples reintroduce the importance of social field interaction. In one sense the hegemonically masculine norms of the neighbourhood

impacted upon other social fields through suspects; as suspects embodied the rules of the neighbourhood, they transferred them and reproduced these relational structures in other social settings including schools and their homes. Harm in the neighbourhood therefore may well have impacted some schools, but maybe it was the way in which the school managed/challenged this which was most important. To use Case 6 as an example – the complainant did not encounter harm in the neighbourhood prior to the abusive incident, and was raped in the school environment. The suspect was harmed in the neighbourhood prior to the abusive incident, and it was the inability of the school and the home to challenge the contextual norms of these experiences, along with a peer group that reinforced the norms of the neighbourhood, that informed the actions of the suspect at the point of the rape. Once again, it is the interaction between fields rather than consideration of any in isolation which illuminates the nature of the social contexts in which young people acted.

## **12.6 Summary findings and discussion: the social field of the neighbourhood**

This chapter has outlined the nature of the nine neighbourhoods that featured across the case files, finding that:

1. The neighbourhood was the third most consistently identified 'harmful' field across the nine cases, although the ways in which young people experienced this was gendered.
2. Male suspects experienced harm, particularly physical abuse, in the neighbourhood prior to the abusive incidents in question, in a process which re/produced hegemonically masculine relations between young men.
3. Complainants, particularly those who were young women, were less likely to experience neighbourhood-based harm prior to the abusive incident. Instead, it was during the abusive incident and in the months that followed that the neighbourhood became an unsafe

social field for them, as their public experiences of abuse served to secure the status and 'safety' of suspects.

4. The aforementioned harm led to relocation being used as a means of ensuring the physical safety of complainants, witnesses, and others, implying that risk rested in the connection between complainants/witnesses and the neighbourhood; i.e. the young person needs to be moved out of the neighbourhood in order to regain safety within that field. This assumption is called into question by current data on the neighbourhoods which indicates that sexual and physical abuse persisted in featured localities despite relocation.
5. Male suspects, who were not relocated following their experiences of harm in the neighbourhood, engaged in a reflexive display of symbolic violence, embodying the hegemonically masculine norms that had characterised their own victimisation and applying them when abusing others to survive in an unchanging environment.
6. Notwithstanding cases where the neighbourhood was implicated in the abusive incidents, in some cases it was the reinforcing relationship between the norms of the school, home, and/or peer group to neighbourhood-based harm, via suspects, that was of greater importance.

The neighbourhood is a space in which young people can build private or personal lives away from parents, albeit in public spaces. If the spaces in which young people are forming friendships and relationships are ones in which they feel unsafe this will impact their choices and space for action. In the case files neighbourhoods were predominantly environments built upon hegemonically masculine gender relations where young men were abused by their peers, and then abused others to gain status and ensure safety. Previous chapters have indicated that these social norms were adopted by peer groups, reinforced, and not challenged, by schools, and often entrenched within the home environment. The layering of harmful norms beyond the home left parents/carers struggling to challenge them.

Having considered each field featured in the files, the following chapter will draw them together with the data on the abusive behaviours and individual biographies of those involved, to offer a socio-cultural account of nine peer-on-peer abuse cases, in the context of rape and murder.

## **13. Discussion: a socio-cultural conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse**

### **13.1 Introduction**

Literature on peer-on-peer abuse demonstrates that the phenomenon:

- involves physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- features gendered and age-specific patterns
- involves both individuals and groups of young people
- occurs within social contexts that may endorse or challenge the existence of that abuse, impacting upon consent and culpability.

The findings examined in the previous seven chapters concur with, and build upon, this pre-existing evidence. Not only did the nine cases occur within social contexts, but these contexts interplayed with one another and, through individual social agents, constructed and reconstructed gendered and age-specific social relations, establishing parameters of consent and culpability. In-depth analysis of social fields has illustrated that, in the cases under consideration, the peer group was where harm was most consistently experienced by young people. However all fields, to varying extents, reproduced or failed to challenge, the norms which underpinned the abusive incidents. It is this inter-field interplay, and the engagement of social agents with this, which is of most significance to the socio-cultural account of peer-on-peer abuse presented in this thesis.

To date, much of the literature has largely identified harm within social fields separately – for example studies regarding family association to HSB (i.e. Henggeler, et al., 2009) or research into peer groups with reference to MPR (i.e. Lambine, 2013). In considering multiple field

relationships, with reference to specific cases of peer-on-peer abuse, a picture emerges of a layered, harmful, climate of socialisation.

Drawing upon Bourdieusian social theory and the findings of the nature of peer-on-peer abuse presented thus far, this chapter will offer a conceptualisation of nine peer-on-peer abuse cases that considers:

- consent, and power, through interplay between context/s and agency
- the significance of 'harmful' social fields for restricting alternative action
- the relationship between different 'harmful' contexts and harmful behaviours (symbolic violence).

In doing so, I contribute to how different manifestations of peer-on-peer abuse may be understood and further support the critiques of individualised accounts of the phenomenon.

### **13.2 Contextualisation via multi-way social field interplay**

As critiqued in chapter two, peer-on-peer abuse has often been conceptualised with reference to individual characteristics and vulnerabilities of young people abstracted from the socio-cultural contexts in which they exist. Considering these individualised factors with reference to the homes, peer groups, schools, and neighbourhoods, with which they interacted through social agents, demonstrates that vulnerability is located with *interplay*. Furthermore, that the aforementioned interaction is multi-directional. To elucidate: social fields challenge and are challenged by, reinforce and are reinforced by, one another via the social agents who navigate between them, creating safety or vulnerability. Through this multi-way interplay four key factors are identified with reference to peer-on-peer abuse.

Firstly, in the case files young people were exposed to and embodied multiple social scripts which promoted or challenged the hegemonically

masculine gender relations and harmful norms associated to abusive behaviours. Figures 8 and 9, illustrate the multiple social scripts that individual complainants and lead suspects were exposed to in Cases 6 (rape) and 8 (murder).

	Case (6) complainant	Case (6) lead suspect
<b>Individual young person</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Age 13</li> <li>• Black British</li> <li>• No vulnerabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male</li> <li>• Age 15</li> <li>• Black British</li> <li>• Previous victimisation</li> <li>• Sexually harasses peers for two years</li> </ul>
<b>Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive</li> <li>• Separated parents</li> <li>• Disagreements with mother regarding contact with father</li> <li>• Mother raised concerns about complainants well-being after assault prior to disclosure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neglect</li> <li>• Older sibling gang-involved</li> <li>• Lack of capacity to parent</li> <li>• Mother raised concerns about suspect's behaviour two years prior to rape</li> </ul>
<b>Peer group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive</li> <li>• Non-abusive</li> <li>• Harmful gender attitudes/beliefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexually and physically abusive</li> <li>• Gang-affiliated</li> <li>• Fights with other young men from different peer groups</li> </ul>
<b>School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gang-affected</li> <li>• Sexual harassment and abuse between students</li> <li>• Rivalries between students at nearby schools</li> <li>• Lack of capacity to safeguard students</li> <li>• Aware of escalation but only respond with school-based sanctions</li> </ul>	
<b>Neighbourhood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal interaction with, and not harmed in, local neighbourhood</li> <li>• Goes to the shops with friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physically and emotionally abused in the local neighbourhood</li> <li>• Peer group developed there as a means of self protection</li> </ul>

**Figure 8 Interactions between individuals and social fields in Case 6**

	Case (8) Complainant	Case (8) lead suspect
<b>Individual young person</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 years old</li> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Asian British</li> <li>• Bereaved of a parent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 years old</li> <li>• Male</li> <li>• Asian British</li> <li>• Previous victimisation</li> </ul>
<b>Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Described as 'strict'</li> <li>• Parent tried to keep daughter at home and did not seek support when concerned about her</li> <li>• Older sibling had been missing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No details of concern collected regarding the family home</li> </ul>
<b>Peer group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small number of young men in the group were gang-associated</li> <li>• Three young women had been missing, one has been taken into care</li> <li>• Young men had experienced robbery and assaults</li> <li>• Individuals were physically violent towards, and in front of, each other</li> <li>• Peer group formed in the neighbourhood and a range of schools</li> </ul>	
<b>School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not harmed in this environment</li> <li>• Peer group in school was supportive</li> <li>• School was unaware of the risk posed to the complainant in the peer group and neighbourhood and was unable to safeguard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gang-affected</li> <li>• Described as having 'airport style security' at the entrance</li> <li>• Physical abuse between students</li> <li>• Neither abusive incident nor peer group is located in the school</li> </ul>
<b>Neighbourhood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two local shopkeepers were aware of the risk faced by the complainant and urged her to speak to her family. They were aware but did not try to intervene</li> <li>• Approached by young men for sexual activity</li> <li>• Physically assaulted on the street and verbally abused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physically and emotionally abused by his peers and those slightly older</li> <li>• Threatened and had his phone stolen</li> <li>• Linked to gang-affiliated young men in the local area</li> </ul>

**Figure 9 Interactions between individuals and social fields in Case 8**

Red fields involved harmful behaviours and norms that re/constructed hegemonically masculine relations; yellow involved harmful norms but safe



behaviours that failed to challenge hegemonically masculine relations; and green fields were ones which featured safe behaviours and social norms.

These figures illustrate two key points. Firstly, that the multiple social scripts to which young people were exposed both reinforced and challenged one another. Arguably, individual characteristics, such as being bereaved in case 8, only became vulnerabilities when they were exploited in 'harmful' fields. Secondly, that young people in the same cases navigated distinct and shared social fields; it was in their shared fields that suspects and complainants came together and, even in the absence of individual vulnerabilities (Case 6), young people were abused. Gendered hierarchies, and the parameters of culpability and consent, were set for the abusive incident within shared fields – informed by the other social fields featured in individual lives. At the point of the abusive incident the gendered norms in the school (in Case 6) and the peer group (in Case 8) reinforced the abusive behaviours of suspects, and problematised individual characteristics of complainants, that in turn had been informed to varying extents by other social scripts during the escalatory period.

The second thematic concern of this sub-section is that, in the files, reflexivity between social fields was at best unchallenging, and at worst reinforcing, of hegemonically masculine relations and norms. Drawing upon Figures 8 and 9, in Case 6, the complainant's peer group failed to offer an alternative social script to that which underpinned the abusive incident - while it was not abusive it still subscribed to harmful gender norms as did the complainant's home in Case 8. Whereas for the suspect in Case 6, every social field that he encountered engaged him in hegemonically masculine hierarchies – in some he was abused by those of, or seeking, higher status, and in others he abused his peers for the same reason. In both instances the harmful parameters of consent were reinforced by fields rather than reconfigured.

Thirdly, the nature of the reflexivity outlined above demonstrates that social field influence was not linear – no social field was subjected to another’s norms in a particular order. Rather the cases involved multi-way, field reflexivity. For example, in the files some young people were exposed to domestic abuse in the home and asserted their agency by spending time away from that environment. In doing so they entered the neighbourhood – a field in which they were abused. In turn, through their peer group, the same young people embodied the gendered rules of the neighbourhood, and engaged in abusive behaviours within that field to achieve status/safety as well as in their school. The school failed to challenge the harmful gender norms underpinning their behaviour or the hegemonically masculine relations it reproduced and hosted the peer group within a reinforcing context. While this sentence structure suggests some linear order to social field influence, it is important to note that much of this reflexivity occurred relatively simultaneously and repeatedly over a period of time. It was during this ongoing reproduction of harmful gender norms, within fields where young people developed through dependency, that abusive incidents occurred.

Finally, while fields in the cases were often mutually reinforcing, findings imply that they were not equally influential. Tables 21 and 22 demonstrate two findings of relevance to this discussion.

**Table 21 ‘Harmful’ social fields by categorisation of young people**

	<b>Complainants (n=9)</b>	<b>Suspects (n=76)</b>	<b>Witnesses (n=45)</b>
<b>‘Harmful’ home</b>	66%	43%	4%
<b>‘Harmful’ peer group</b>	89%	100%	100%
<b>‘Harmful’ school</b>	89%	93%	91%
<b>‘Harmful’ neighbourhood</b>	89%	75%	100%

**Table 22 ‘Harmful’ social fields by roles in the peer network across all files**

	<b>Leaders (n=20)</b>	<b>Followers (n=52)</b>	<b>Bystander (+) (n=31)</b>	<b>Bystander (-) (n=20)</b>
<b>‘Harmful’ home</b>	70%	39%	16%	10%
<b>‘Harmful’ peer group</b>	100%	98%	96%	100%
<b>‘Harmful’ school</b>	90%	94%	90%	90%
<b>‘Harmful’ neighbourhood</b>	80%	69%	100%	95%

Firstly, according to the available information, the peer group was the social field where young people most consistently experienced, or were exposed to, harm in the nine cases. Secondly, while different cohorts of young people had relatively similar rates of exposure to harm in the peer group, school and neighbourhood in the files, the home was a site of harm for those who were leaders at the point of the abusive incident more than it was for followers or bystanders.

Both of these findings are important given that, in addition to being the most ‘harmful’ space for the 145 young people featured in this study, the social norms of the peer group also appeared to carry the most influential weight in the nine cases. Accounts of parental incapacity to safeguard young people (chapter nine) exemplified the influence of peer group norms in usurping those of the home. Furthermore, when individual young people sought to challenge the norms of their peer groups in the files they did so from within that social field – they wanted to remain a part of it.

As a result, social fields interplayed in a way that: hegemonically masculine relations within the neighbourhood influenced the social rules within peer group and schools; when schools were unable to either safeguard young people or promote the development of pro-social peer groups, the social rules from the neighbourhood were embodied in that environment; even if the home promoted supportive and safe social norms for their individual young people, the weight of peer group influence, coupled with the reproduction of harmful gendered norms at school,

undermined parental interventions. Further to this, as the home appeared to be particularly harmful for leaders via exposure to domestic abuse, this harm by proxy informed the abusive act, as the leader influenced the peer group which was ultimately the most weighted social field.

Given this finding it is hardly surprising that pre-existing literature has signalled that peer groups may be more significant than families in terms of their association to peer-on-peer abuse (Barter, et al., 2009). My study has explored *why* this is the case and *how* such an association interplays with nine abusive incidents. The significance of the peer group calls into question the persistent focus within research and practice on the association of individual and familial vulnerabilities to peer-on-peer abuse, in the absence of specificity about the nature of peer group involvement in the manifestations of abuse under analysis. This suggests that both a clarification about when incidents involved, or were associated to, peer groups of the complainant or suspect, and a re-balancing of analytical attention, may be required in such cases.

This sub-section has illustrated that, in the nine cases under consideration, the abusive incidents occurred within multi-way reflexive social fields, which reinforced hegemonically masculine relations to varying extents and were simultaneously navigated by young people. It was in this context that individual characteristics were engaged as ‘vulnerabilities’; in other fields the same individual factors may not have been associated to an abusive incident. Young people embodied the various social scripts within those fields of which the peer group’s seemed to carry most weight. That the peer group was both the most ‘harmful’ and the most influential social field in the case files raises questions about the potential for social change and the boundaries of individual agency – questions which the following sub-section will now consider.

### **13.3 Generative capacity of the habitus and social change**

In light of competing and/or reinforcing social scripts the roles of individual agency and 'habitus' loom large. Findings chapters identified positive bystanders, positive intimate relationships, and relatively safe homes, peers and individual teachers, who offered alternative ways of acting and undermined the idea that the rapes/murders in the files were determined. However, that alternative actions and bystander intervention failed to alter the outcome in the nine cases implies that in these instances the 'pessimism' of Bourdieu's social theory is warranted on three grounds.

Firstly, when teachers 'spoke to' boys who displayed HSB, or friends counselled their peers on harmful relationships, they relied upon discourse about behaviours and not action to alter hegemonically masculine social norms in which the behaviours had formed. Yet Bourdieu is clear – the habitus needs to embody different practice in order to change, it cannot simply be exposed to, or told about, that which is different. Secondly, research indicates that young people talk to their peers for advice and not because they believe that peers can afford them any protection (Cossar, et al., 2013); this limitation is borne out in my study, particularly in instances where young people attempted to change peer behaviours while remaining part of a peer group, in which they were exposed to, or experienced, harm, and in the absence of support from external social fields to bolster change. Thirdly, professionals, young people, and parents attempted to change individual actions in the absence of any change in the social conditions in which the abusive behaviours occurred. Therefore, individual young people were expected to act differently despite their neighbourhood, peer group, school or family remaining unsafe, largely promoting harmful gender norms and maintaining hegemonically masculine gender relations. They were expected to achieve safety without a pursuit of hegemonic masculinity within social fields where status, and arguably safety, were defined on those grounds. Yet, as outlined by proponent of Bourdieu's social theory (i.e. McRobbie 2004) social

conditions need to change in order for the generative capacity of the habitus to be realised.

These three limitations mean that while the abusive incidents in question were far from determined, the potential for change was undermined by the multi-way reflexive interplay between fields and agents in which hegemonically masculine, hierarchical, social conditions persisted. Such persistence had implications for how culpability and consent were constructed in the nine cases.

#### **13.4 Symbolic violence, consent and culpability**

Faced with persistently harmful social conditions, young people in the nine cases seemed to engage in different forms of symbolic violence. Those who led the abusive incidents were exposed to multiple layers of harm, and mutually reinforcing relational hierarchies, in their homes, schools and neighbourhoods. In the absence of alternatives, leaders embodied these rules and reproduced gendered behaviours to which they had been exposed. Followers, and negative bystanders, appeared to embody the norms of 'harmful' neighbourhoods, and in the absence of sufficiently weighted challenge from their homes/schools, engaged in symbolic violence through their peer group in pursuit of hegemonically masculine status and safety by proxy. Positive peer groups invariably either adopted the harmful gender norms, but not behaviours, of abusive peer groups in order to navigate environments such as their schools, or simply failed to challenge harmful gender norms accepting them as part of that environment. Finally those who opted to challenge, such as bystanders and complainants, were ultimately moved out of the social fields in which the abuse took place. The use of relocation implying that these fields were not for changing, and that the harmful rules and behaviours would endure.

It is within this context, and with particular reference to notions of 'safety', that social models of consent and culpability can be developed. Faced with the prospect of relocation, some bystanders failed to intervene and

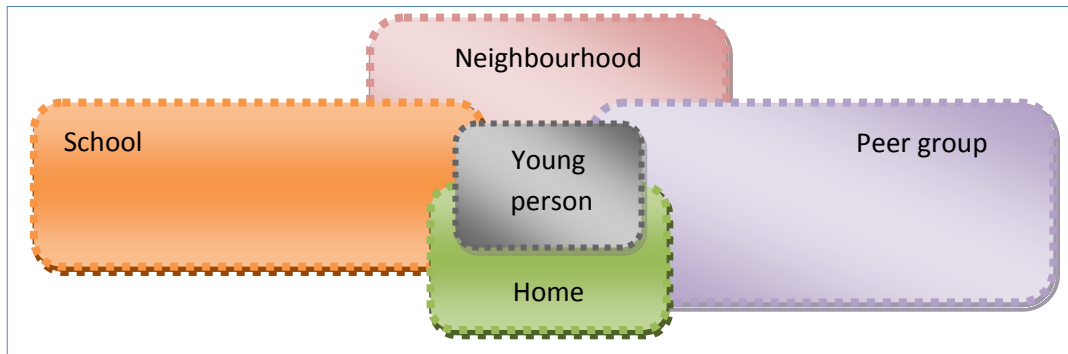
some complainants while not consenting did not attempt to challenge those who were abusing them. For leaders, in particular, the use of symbolic violence appears so rehearsed that it is likely that this decision making process was almost unconscious (Bourdieu, 1990). Like Bourdieu's example of a tennis player who knows the rules of the game so well that they almost unconsciously run to the net when a ball is played to that part of the court (1990), leaders had an embodied and entrenched feel for the hegemonically masculine fields that they were in and acted accordingly to achieve/maintain status.

### **13.5 Conclusion**

The four thematic considerations above lead to a conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse which locates harm, and the re/construction of gendered and age specific norms, in multiple fields at the point of the abusive incident. When young people abused their peers across the nine cases, they did so through the embodiment of gendered norms and age-specific rules that operated across social fields. Their experiences of power and powerlessness differed across those fields and were informed by how fields interacted with one another. The incidents under consideration were more than the rape or murder that took place. They were the homes, peer groups, schools, and neighbourhoods to which that abusive incident was associated, and their interplay with young people who played both static and fluid roles when involved. It was the interaction between all of these spaces and individuals that overtime created:

- gendered and age-specific norms that in turn informed relational hierarchies in which young people operated and abused, or were abused by, their peers
- motive during an escalation period
- a lack of alternative and safe options for the young people involved
- a persistent lack of safety within associated fields following the abusive incident.

Considering the above, in re-thinking the social field circles upon which this study was developed, it seems that these nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse occurred across and between social fields that interacted with one another as illustrated in Figure 10.



**Figure 10 Framework for conceptualising peer-on-peer abuse**

Unlike the original diagram of circles, Figure 10 acknowledges that incidents of peer-on-peer abuse in the case files were informed by an overlapping *interplay* between individuals and social fields characterised by:

- the constructed and varied weights of influence possessed by each field (illustrated by their different sizes – changeable for each young person/case)
- a multi-way, rather than linear, relationship of reflexivity, reproduction and challenge between fields via the habitus (illustrated by overlay and dotted rather than sealed borders).

Placing the young person in the middle of the diagram:

- contextualises individual characteristics which can be constructed as vulnerabilities in relation to the fields in which they are realised
- centralises agency within a context of multiple fields that are impacting upon, and are impacted by, other fields via the young person.

Before considering the responses to the nine cases and the safeguarding implications of taking this approach it important to consider broader



societal influences in which the featured fields/agents interacted. Nine neighbourhoods and 31 schools feature in my study implying that the cases were far from isolated incidences. Chapter three demonstrated that harmful gender norms operate within societal structures, and are arguably global (Hatfield, 2010). A socially exclusive society (Young, 1999) in which 85,000 women are raped every year and two women are killed a week by their partners (Ministry of Justice, Home Office and ONS, 2013), was the broader social setting for the abusive incidents in question. While not an explicitly recorded feature of the case files, it is imperative that the conceptualisation offered is framed in this way. Without this context, safeguarding responses, that I will now consider, risk problematising local environments and individuals isolated from the broader social scripts that inform their development and interaction with services.

Having offered a socio-cultural conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse, I will now explore the ways in which agencies responded to the nine cases. These responses will then be compared to the conceptualisation proposed in this chapter. This process will identify the thematic findings of this study, their implications for safeguarding practice and enable the proposition of a framework for responding to the cases of peer-on-peer abuse presented in this thesis.

## **14. Findings: how professionals responded - identification, assessment, and intervention**

### **14.1 Introduction**

Beyond capturing evidence on the abusive incidents, the young people involved, and the social environments they navigated, files documented the response by professionals to the nine cases, with specific relation to the police investigation. For the most part, records focused on intervention from the point of identification (or disclosure) through to conviction or, in one case, the decision to not prosecute. In some cases information was available on ongoing intervention following conviction, and contact with professionals prior to the abusive incident in question. This information has been used to build a picture of how these nine instances of peer-on-peer abuse were responded to by professionals, and will be presented in this chapter with specific reference to the:

- professional response to warning signs during the escalatory period
- identification of the abusive incidents
- overall approach of the response
- assessment of risk
- management and timeline of the investigation
- ongoing or additional harm that occurred, or was identified, during the investigation
- professional response to the case that did not proceed to charge
- interventions with individuals and with social fields
- outcomes of the response.

Having outlined this response, its effectiveness will be assessed by cross-referencing it with the socio-cultural account of the cases proposed in the previous chapter.

## 14.2 Warning signs during escalation and post abuse

Case file evidence indicated that some professionals missed opportunities to both disrupt periods of escalation and to proactively identify abusive incidents prior to disclosure.

The lack of escalation-disruption or proactive identification is a concern given the number of services that young people were recorded as being in contact with prior to, and during, the abusive period (Table 23).

**Table 23 Recorded evidence of young people's contact with services**

Service	No. of young people recorded as being in contact with the service prior to the offence		No. of young people recorded as being in contact with the service during the offence period	
	N	%	N	%
Education	107	74.4	91	62.7
Police	79	54.5	56	38.6
Children's social care	18	12.4	7	4.8
Youth justice	27	18.5	20	13.8
Housing	12	8.3	3	2.1
Sexual health <sup>33</sup>	2	1.4	1	0.7
Mental health	3	2.1	2	1.4

<sup>33</sup> It is possible that a far greater number of young people were accessing sexual health, mental health, and voluntary sector, provision prior and during the abusive period but this was rarely recorded in case files as it was not viewed as relevant to police investigations. However on occasions where two complainants were recorded as having had contact with sexual health provision case files indicated that services did not identify that both were in abusive relationships. Both were young women, aged 14 years old. In one of these cases the young woman was ultimately murdered and in another she was part of a group who committed a murder. In neither case was there a record that the service identified their abusive relationships. There is also no record that information was shared about this service contact in a way that triggered proactive support being offered to those young women. The fact that they had contact with sexual health services is only recorded within the case files due to peer witness statements. It is not possible to ascertain whether other sexual health service providers missed opportunities to identify escalation.

Files indicate that professionals from the agencies in Table 23, particularly those in the police and education, failed to identify or respond appropriately to the warning signs of escalation displayed by young people in the nine cases. As chapter eight demonstrated, some complainants and suspects displayed behaviours that, when considered in the context of the fields they were navigating, should have triggered a cause for concern; particularly with regard to the rate at which suspects were going missing from home and/or displayed harmful sexual behaviour prior to the abusive incidents. Arguably, if these behaviours had been responded to sufficiently, escalation would have been disrupted.

In the years and months prior to assuming a leadership role in six cases (five rape, one murder), young men displayed harmful sexual behaviour in the school environment at the problematic, and sometimes abusive, end of Hackett's continuum of sexual behaviours (2011). While schools were aware of this behaviour their responses were insufficient, conceptualising incidents of sexual harassment as rule-breaking that could be addressed through generic school sanctions, as exemplified in the following excerpts (bold added by author):

Year 8:

(6B1) pushed a female student against a wall, threw her to the ground and kicked her in the ribs. The student stated that this was not the first time that 6B1 had done this to her and that she was afraid of him because he was in a gang. (6B1) **Put on report**

Year 9:

6B1 seen involved in a fight with Yr10 and Yr11 boys

March: 6B1 **spoken to** by vice principal for 'inappropriate behaviour towards females' relation to allegation that he was seen sexually assaulting a pupil by another member of staff and overheard talking about his gang (Case 6)

Report states he had a history at school of inappropriately touching girls when he was in year 7 and extorting money from them. It states that **'school has dealt with these incidents'**...File also states that he has been 'touching girls inappropriately', **'he has been severely warned about his behaviour and told he is committing offences ... his behaviour will be closely monitored' (2008)** (Case 4)

Even though in the latter case the school seemed to recognise the seriousness of the behaviour being displayed by the suspect, files indicate that it continued to manage the issue without the help of external agencies. In two cases (one rape and one murder) where schools attempted to make HSB referrals to children's social care, suspects were assessed as not hitting the threshold for an external intervention and the school was left to manage the behaviour themselves.

Using school sanctions to manage harmful and abusive sexual behaviour conceptualises it as something some young people will do if not controlled through rules, such as running through corridors, talking in class, and not doing their homework. Yet, literature outlined in chapter two, promotes systemic and therapeutic responses to HSB that are informed by an assessment. Furthermore, contrary to the theoretical perspective of my study, school sanctions imply that telling a young person not to do something will stem abusive behaviour, and a change in the social conditions of that behaviour is not required, whereas Bourdieu contends that the habitus needs to engage in, and embody, alternative rules in order to adapt.

As outlined in chapter eight, where data was available, 86% of suspects were also recorded as going missing from home prior to the abusive incident. The ability to respond to this warning sign was hindered for two reasons. Firstly, missing incidents were not always reported by parents/carers. Of those who went missing only 58% were ever reported as such. Furthermore, over two-thirds of reports (67%) were only made

once rather than on every occasion that a young person went missing, illustrated by the following qualitative accounts:

1B4's mother had called the police as a result of the subject not returning home from college...she also stated he had been recently been coming home with money which concerned her. (Case 1 (rape suspect), first report from a parent but not first incident of going missing)

4B4....not reported missing by his parent – identified as school reported to the police that 4B4 had not attended school for a week. When police attended the home mother stated that 4B4 often packs his bag and stays with friends but he might also be residing with his father. (Case 4 (rape suspect), went missing repeatedly but was not reported as missing by his parents)

Secondly, files indicated that when suspects were reported missing their behaviour was always perceived as something that warranted concern:

9B4 is reported as saying to the police that his mother had 'kicked him out' of home and that he didn't have anywhere to go after he had handed himself in (in). His mother substantiated the claims stating that she had not let him in when he came back to the house. Mother phoned police to confirm that he had returned and also stated that going missing was his 'usual pattern of behaviour so no debrief was required'. (Case 9)

A similar account was found in a case where a 38 hour missing incident of a 14-year old female suspect did not trigger concern amongst professionals – she was with her boyfriend at the time and they were close in age. The closeness of age resulted in professionals failing to do a background check on the boyfriend. Had they done so, they would have found that he had sexual offences against his name from the age of 12, including indecent assault on a female who was under 14 years old.

Accounts of professional responses to 'missing' and HSB, prior to the abusive incidents, suggests that gendered and age-specific expectations were drawn upon to make sense of young people's behaviours. Perceived as social agents who were choosing to 'act out' – young men harassed young women in school and stayed out late at night, and young women rebelled against rules in the home and stayed out with their boyfriends. They appeared to be viewed as individuals testing boundaries in accordance with acceptable gendered norms, rather than as young people, at risk of significant harm, adopting norms within harmfully gendered fields. At best, in these cases, professionals intervened in a way that sought to manage/control young people rather than protect them from risk, reshape the rules that were informing their behaviour and identify escalation.

Following the abusive incidents there is also evidence that some professionals missed opportunities to proactively identify harm prior to disclosure. Three rape complainants didn't make immediate disclosures but displayed behaviours which indicated that something may have happened to them, as the following example illustrates:

6G1 became withdrawn and wrote suicidal statements on school work – school see this and have a discussion. (The complainant) stated that she had been quiet as she didn't want to do anything that would draw attention to herself...Became verbally abusive to teachers...Didn't want to go out without a friend with her...Skin condition flared up. (Case 6)

Complainant behaviours included increased physical abuse of their peers in school, engagement in offending, suicidal ideation and disengagement from education – all 'warning signs' identified in the peer-on-peer abuse literature. However, while professionals, especially those in the police and schools, were aware of these behaviours they considered them abstracted from the contexts to which complainants were associated. As such, professionals sought to manage complainant behaviour rather than

address its cause. In only one case did such behaviours result in proactive identification; a matter to be explored in the following sub-section.

It is evident from this data that the principal agencies in contact with the young people in the files were education and the police. Despite the levels of harm these young people had been exposed to, children's social care were only recorded as being in contact with 18 prior to the abusive incident and seven during the abusive period. There is little evidence to suggest that those in education or the police responded to the warning signs displayed by young people in a way that proactively identified, or disrupted, the abuse in question. Rather, responses to young men and young women who went missing, and to young men who displayed HSB in school, indicate that warning signs were unrecognised as such or, being based on gendered and age-specific stereotypes, were misunderstood.

### **14.3 Identification**

A failure to proactively respond to the warning signs meant that, as outlined in Table 24, abusive incidents were largely identified by professionals following either:

- purposeful disclosure (where a complainant told an adult or professional that they had been abused)
- accidental disclosure (where a complainant told a professional about sexual activity but did not realise that this was a disclosure about abuse)
- peer disclosure (where a friend of a complainant told a professional without the prior agreement of the complainant)
- a murder.

The one example of proactive identification occurred 23 months after the initial rape, and followed a failure to appropriately respond to other warning signs displayed by the complainant:



6G1 was seen crying by a teacher 5 months after the assault. 6G1 was too upset to speak but gave a written account. 6G1 was spoken to by a teacher and agreed to write an account as to why she was crying. She was asked to clarify what she meant by the term 'inappropriate' and 6G1 confirmed that meant sex. The teacher asked 6G1 to stop and explained that she would be supported. (Case 6)

**Table 24 Process of identification by case**

Case ID	Process of identification	Initially identified by	Date of disclosure
1	Purposeful disclosure	other young person	immediately afterwards
2	Purposeful disclosure	parent	immediately afterwards
3	Purposeful disclosure	other young person	immediately afterwards
4	Peer disclosure	other young person	2-6 months later
5	Accidental disclosure	sexual health	2-6 months later
6	Proactive identification	school	12 months+
7	Murder victim	neighbour	N/A
8	Murder victim	police	N/A
9	Murder victim	neighbour	N/A

As Table 24 illustrates, like Case 6, in two other rape cases disclosure did not take place in the immediate aftermath of the incident. Furthermore, the three disclosures that happened immediately after the assaults were initially made to a parent/peer and, largely unbeknown to professionals, had been preceded by a period of escalation summarised in Table 25.

**Table 25 Escalation in three rape cases that involved an immediate disclosure**

Case ID	Escalation
1	The complainant was physically assaulted and verbally threatened in the weeks prior to the rape by the lead suspect and those associated to him. Peers were aware, as were families, but professionals were not
2	The complainant had spoken to one suspect via social media and over the phone in the days prior to the rape and arranged to meet up with him. Peers were aware but professionals were not
3	The lead suspect (G14) had been bullying other students within the school environment for two years, including the complainant. The co-suspect (B6) had sexually harassed young women in the school for two years prior to the rape. Professionals were aware of B6 behaviour and responded with school sanctions. Professionals were unaware of G14 bullying behaviour stating 'G14 does not have a reputation as a bully, there have not been any bullying allegations although G14 is considered to be 'confident and headstrong'

The accidental disclosure occurred when a young person accessed a sexual health service. She stated that she was having sex with boys in parks but because she was 12 years old the sexual health service made a referral to children's social care and an investigation was later launched.

This sub-section has illustrated ad hoc and reactive identification of the nine cases. Despite the warning signs outlined in the previous sub-section, and the nature of the harmful social fields in which those warning signs occurred (as illustrated in previous chapters), case file evidence indicates that the identification process was largely reliant upon young people making disclosures.

#### **14.4 Overview of the response**

Case files documented the professional response with primary reference to a police investigation. As such, the police response was recorded in every case, in addition to:

- schools being involved in eight out of nine cases

- children's social care being informed by the police and brought into the management of four<sup>34</sup> cases
- mental health service involvement in five cases (primarily for the support of complainants or their families)
- sexual health services engagement (including sexual assault referral centres) in five out of the six rape cases but not in the murder cases
- GP's of complainants being contacted by the police in three rape cases.

As these figures indicate, there was no consistent pattern of multi-agency working evidenced across the nine cases. It was rare that cases were overseen by formal multi-agency structures. In three cases Gold groups (multi-agency police investigation groups) were called to oversee the investigation. In four cases ad-hoc multi-agency meetings were recorded as being held between schools, police services and other partners on occasions when professionals deemed they would be useful. There was evidence that child protection frameworks were used in two cases to decide whether complainants had met the thresholds for a section 47 investigation, but not to have oversight of the whole case. There were also records of multi-agency meetings being called to agree responses to incidents of witness intimidation in three cases. In no cases was there a record of multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC)<sup>35</sup>, child sexual exploitation groups, or multi-agency gangs groups being either engaged in discussions around the cases or used to allocate support to the young people affected. The lack of consistent multi-agency practice, or adherence to a minimum standard of partnership working, meant that individual agencies and professionals appear to have responded to the incidents independently rather than through any specific partnership model.

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<sup>34</sup> They made an offer of support in five cases but only proactively worked in four.

<sup>35</sup> A MARAC was used to discuss the behaviour of a murder suspect following his conviction as he was considered to be manipulating staff, but it was not used in relation the abusive incident itself and its impact on the young people who were associated to it.

The six rape cases were investigated by the sexual offences unit in the police service and the three murder cases were investigated by the homicide unit. In one case the rape complaint was initially made to a child abuse investigation unit who decided that it was not their responsibility as the abuse had occurred in an extra-familial context.

The fact that the abuse was extra-familial also seemed to inform the level of engagement of children's social care in the initial stages of the investigations. Given that data was accessed from the police and crown prosecution service it is possible that information on interventions from children's social care and other agencies were not always included in the files. However, where information on children's social care was available, it indicated that their role was interpreted by professionals as being to ascertain whether the homes of the complainants were safe. In five of the six rape cases children's social care was recorded as having made an offer of support to complainant families. This offer was followed up with direct support and intervention to complainant families in two cases. Their role and intervention was not perceived as extending to extra-familial risk, or risk in the homes of the suspects, a parameter that is further evidenced by the way professionals used assessments to inform the case management process.

## **14.5 Assessment**

Following the identification of the abusive incidents there is little in the case files to suggest that assessment tools were used to effectively inform the management of the risk posed to and/or by young people during the investigation. While police and crown prosecution service files may not include all relevant information on assessments, some level of assessment was required to proceed with an investigation, and the assessment tools that were recorded are outlined in Table 26.

**Table 26 Record of assessments referred to by case**

Case ID	Assessment Used
1	Youth offending services assessed suspect's previous offences (robbery, violence against the person), and one suspect was assessed by children's social care when taken into care during the investigation period, but none were conducted with specific reference to the investigation process
2	Request for a mental health assessment on one suspect in the years prior to the abuse incident but this was not completed. No other assessments used
3	CAMHS assessment conducted on bystanders historically as two had attempted suicide, but no other assessments conducted
4	Youth offending services assessed suspect's previous offences (robbery, violence against the person) CAF used to collect information on school attendance of complainant Strategy meeting and core assessment conducted on complainant
5	Youth offending services assessed suspect's previous offences (robbery, violence against the person) Core assessment on complainant from previous child protection plan for neglect LAC reviews and assessments conducted when taken into care on a section 20 order (voluntarily accommodated) during investigation period
6	Youth offending services assessed suspect's previous offences (robbery, violence against the person) but none used in the abusive incident
7	Youth offending services assessed suspect's previous offences (robbery, violence against the person) but none used in the abusive incident Mental health assessment requested of one suspect following the offence but not of any others – post conviction, pre-sentence
8	Mental health assessment requested of one suspect following the offence but not of any others – pre-sentence MARAC called to conduct an assessment on risks to professionals post charge
9	One suspect 'missing' assessed as low risk one year before the abusive incident Youth offending services assessed suspect's previous offences (robbery, violence against the person) but none used in the abusive incident

On at least two occasions, rape files indicated that child protection assessments were used to consider the behaviour of female complainants abstracted from context and therefore under-predicted risk. In both cases a lack of individual disclosure, rather than a consideration of the fields being navigated by the young women, was used to inform the assessment decision. In doing so, professionals employed gendered stereotypes and

confused assumptions about agency and age/dependency, resulting in an under-prediction of risk as a result exemplified in the following excerpts (bold added by author).

Core and initial assessment conducted following the CAF ... First line of the assessment: 4G1 is 13 years old and there is evidence that **'she is involved in a gang and enjoying the notoriety'** because in a discussion with a social worker she said that she was part of the gang and that 'if you ride with them you die with them'. **Notes immediately afterwards that 4G1 'may be being sexually exploited'**. Core Assessment also stated that the family moved because 4G1 was 'involved in gang culture and **placing herself at risk and (was) beyond parental control**'. States that there is **no evidence that 4G1 is sexually active bar rumours from a local street gang** (discounting information from mother and CAF implying that she was). 4G1 stated that she was scared of reprisals if she named the individuals who had physically assaulted her. 4G1 also stated that she had carried a knife before and would be prepared to carry a gun for gang members including bringing it into the family home. Actions/tasks agreed regarding referral to support services but assessment concluded that **'threshold was not met as no direct disclosure had been made'**. (Case 4)

Following liaison with children's services G1 denied (the disclosure) and refused to engage... (Children's social care) stated that 5G1 is **'not in immediate danger'** and referral to CAIT generated. (Case 5)

In these excerpts, the failure of services to engage young women was interpreted as young women making free choices not to engage in support. A lack of appreciation amongst some professionals about the gendered risks within fields upon which young people were dependent is evident in statements about young women not being in 'immediate danger' and 'enjoying the notoriety' of their experiences.

In addition, assessments that were conducted on complainants prioritised the risk posed to them in the home. 'Incapacity to parent' was the reason given for the placement of two young people in foster care, who were both voluntarily accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. In a bid to be moved, one complainant assaulted her carer and damaged property when the risk that she faced outside of the home had not resulted in her family being relocated:

Placed into emergency foster care and then into foster care out of the neighbourhood aged 12 as a result of her smashing up furniture in her grandmother's house (although she had requested to be moved for 10 months prior to this instance as a result of exploitation in the local area) (Case 5)

A focus on 'capacity to parent' shifted attention towards the actions of parents/carers, and in these cases the individual behaviour of female complainants, and away from the role of lead professionals in addressing the behaviours of suspects external to the home that were impacting upon parental capacity. Yet, contrary to family focused assessments, other professionals such as youth workers and learning mentors emphasised that complainants required relocation due to risk in the local area:

Professionals, including a learning mentor in school, recorded that G1 was in '**imminent and serious danger** in current circumstances.

**Required removal from social and home environment**'. (Case 5)

A linked CRIS states that **moving the whole family is a matter of urgency 'a move must be facilitated** so that the family can leave (the local area) and avoid all possible threats and recrimination' (however the complainant was moved away from family and placed in the foster care in the first instance). (Case 4)

In all cases available assessments were focused on the behaviour of, and risk posed to, those identified as complainants. Little attention was paid to risk posed to or by suspects, beyond immediate risk to complainants which

influenced bail and remand conditions. This narrow focus failed to address the risk that suspects may have posed to other young women or young men during the investigation process. For example, there is no record that AIM assessments (chapter two) were used to inform the management of rape suspects pre-trial. This, in turn, contributed to gendered and individualised responsibilisation of risk management: The behaviour of, and professional engagement with, female complainants was seen as a route to preventing further harm, rather than an intervention with the harmful environments, and harmful behaviours, of suspects.

In addition, there is evidence that the risks faced by suspects, some of which may have influenced the offence, were not addressed. Suspects in six cases were returned to 'harmful' homes while they waited for their trials to commence, for example:

[Paperwork] in relation to arrest of 7B10 for offence in question. Officers indicate concern regarding the mother's mental state - she admitted to being severely depressed and that all her children were on the child protection register for neglect. Solicitor noted that she is incapable of acting as an appropriate adult for 7B10 due to her mental state (however 7B10 was bailed to that address and remained in that social field until his conviction). (Case 7, murder)

Therefore, in keeping with the critique espoused in the literature chapters, children's social care and police assessments in the case files concentrated on the behaviours of individual young people and parental capacity to safeguard. A focus on individual behaviour and choice implied that young people, be they complainants, suspects or witnesses, placed themselves in risky contexts, and that the contexts themselves did not need to be addressed. The additional attention on capacity to parent implied that safety rested with the parent/carer's ability to control or manage young people's unsafe choices. Yet, other professionals such as youth offending workers, learning mentors, and sexual health nurses, located risk beyond the individual behaviours and the homes of the young



people affected. When a complainant chose to spend time with her friends, or a suspect decided to travel on the bus to school, they recognised that these choices were only risky if the gendered norms within those respective peer group or neighbourhoods were themselves unsafe: resulting in young women being sexually harassed in their friendship group or boys being robbed of their mobile phones by other young men while travelling to school. The choices being made were not unsafe in isolation of the fields to which they were related.

Although professionals knew that young women had been raped in their peer group, school, or local neighbourhood, there is no evidence that these locations, or their interplay with one another and individual young people, were assessed. Such processes failed to consider the roles of any professionals in addressing risk in fields beyond the home, and instead were concerned with how young people, and their families, could keep themselves away from abusive fields. The disparity between where risk occurred and where assessments focused was exacerbated during the investigation process – a discord considered in the following sub-section.

#### **14.6 Investigation management and timeline**

Following the identification of the abusive incidents, and on occasion an assessment of some of the young people affected, investigations were launched across all the nine cases<sup>36</sup>. As a means of gathering evidence, the investigation process drew upon fields in which the abuse occurred in two ways.

Firstly, interviews were used in all nine cases, eight of which included interviewing members of the peer groups that were implicated in, or associated to, the abusive incidents. Of the 145 young people featured across the nine cases, they were involved in the investigation as follows:

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<sup>36</sup> Given that these cases were accessed via police files this is a bias finding and would not always be the case.

**Table 27 Interviews conducted by categorisation of young people**

	Interviewed/contacted		Gave evidence/statement	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Complainants (n=9)</b>	6	66.6	6	67.6
<b>Suspects (n=76)</b>	71	93.4	71	93.4
<b>Witnesses (n=45)</b>	29	64.4	22	48.9
<b>Others (n=12)</b>	10	83%	7	58%

Secondly, the public nature of the majority of abusive incidents (outlined in chapter seven) meant that investigations drew upon other evidence within those fields.

- Forensic evidence from abuse sites were used in six cases.
- CCTV evidence was drawn upon in five cases.
- Phone evidence was gathered in seven cases and computers seized in five.

In five cases, this process evidenced young people planning to commit the abusive incidents, or discussing them afterwards, via social media (four cases):

G2 (friend of suspect) spoke to G1 (suspect) just before the murder took place and G1 told her [what was going to happen]... G1 also spoke to G2 and G3 (friends of suspect) immediately after the murder to try to get them to cover for her but they refused to meet with her. (Case 9)

G2 (friend of complainant) ... had been acting as a go-between for G1 (complainant) and B1 (suspect) ...G2 had texts on her phone from B1 [and texts] stating what threats he had made from G1. (Case 8)

(Social media) communication led by B1 who asked for weapons. B4 stated that 'madness' was going to happen the following day and told

an individual to bring whatever he could and asked someone else to 'buy some nank (knives)'. (Case 7)

The level of evidence generated resulted in guilty pleas (from some suspects) in two cases.

Despite this success, by engaging with fields in which the abuse had occurred but assessment had not considered, the investigation process incurred delays and on occasion elevated risks to those associated with the abusive incident.

The length of time taken to investigate cases ranged between 6 and 24 months from the point of disclosure/identification to the conviction or closure of the investigation as outlined in Table 28:

**Table 28 Investigation length by case file**

		Length of investigation (months)			
		6-12 months	12-18	19-24	25+
Case ID  1-6 Rape 7-9 Murder	1		X		
	2	X			
	3			X	
	4	X			
	5				X
	6		X		
	7				X
	8		X		
	9		X		
Total		2	4	1	2

Of the two cases that were completed within a year, one was a 'no further action' case that did not proceed to charge. The other had the smallest number of young people involved (n=4) and the complainant made an immediate and purposeful disclosure to her parent. The majority of cases took in excess of a year to complete, even though two other rape complainants made immediate disclosures after the abusive incidents. When the time lag between the abusive incident and identification is added onto the table above, an even greater period of risk and vulnerability is identified for some of the young people in the case files – as outlined in Table 29.

**Table 29 Timeline from abusive incident to conviction**

Case	Identification (time from incident)	Arrests (time from incident)	Charged (time from incident)	Convicted (time from incident)
1	Day of incident	1-8 days later	6 months later	20 months later
2	Day of incident	1 day later	3 days later	10 months later
3	Day of incident	4-8 days later	4.5 months later	11 months later
4	16 months after	19 months later	NFA decision	N/A
5	4 months after	16 months later	23 months later	31 months later
6	23 months after	25 months later	26 months later	34 months later
7	Day of incident	1-28 days later	(Missing data)	25 months later
8	Day of incident	1-9 days later	31 days later	13 months later
9	Day of incident	2-8 days later	(Missing data)	12 months later

Given the complex nature of many of these cases, particularly the large numbers of young people involved, investigations were likely to take some time. However, the detailed breakdown of the investigation process in Table 29 highlights two time lags. Firstly there are gaps between the points of the abusive incidents and when they were disclosed (excluding immediate disclosures and murder cases). Secondly, there was a further lag between when the abuse was identified and charges were laid. For example in Case 3, even though arrests happened in the week following the incident, suspects were not charged for over four months.

In some instances, delays occurred between identification and arrest in the absence of a formal complaint to the police. For example in Case 5 the young woman accidentally disclosed to a sexual health nurse but was not willing to give a police statement due to concerns for personal safety in the peer group and local area. As a result the information was shared between professionals but an investigation wasn't launched<sup>37</sup>. Whereas in Cases 1 and 3, while the complainants disclosed to the police immediately, time

<sup>37</sup> A response that is similar to that of children's social care, evidenced in the previous sub-section, who assessed the cases as low risk in the absence of a disclosure.

taken to identify all suspects, and the need to agree a safe moment to bring charges, caused delays. In two cases delays were incurred when retrieving phone or internet evidence.

A lack of appreciation about ongoing risk within social fields external to the home also contributed to the delays. As outlined in the previous sub-section, on more than one occasion professionals commented on the need for complainant families to be moved for their own safety due to harm in the neighbourhood, peer group and school. Yet in Case 5 children's services took up to ten months to do so and in other cases young people were moved without their families:

Following appearance (4G1) is taken into care on s20 and placed with foster carers. While she settled (she) 'expressed strong desire to return to her mother'...Police recommend that children's social care move the family, but children's social care repeatedly state that they have not been able to find suitable accommodation. (Case 4)

Managing witness or complainant intimidation (five cases) and identifying witnesses to provide evidence willingly (five case) caused delays that were directly associated to persisting harm within fields following the abusive incidents. In order to build an investigation, professionals needed to manage and engage with fields beyond the individuals involved (and their families), yet the assessment had not considered these. Across the nine cases, investigation processes were underpinned by an assessment that hadn't considered the social fields in which complainants and witnesses were at risk. Assessments focused on individuals and homes, while investigations rested upon peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods. In addition to contributing to delays, this discordant approach elevated the risk to the young people involved in the investigation – a matter explored in the following sub-section.

### **14.7 Ongoing and additional harm**

The investigation process triggered harm in the form of threats, and acts of retaliation, towards those involved, and surfaced evidence on additional harm that had occurred within the fields, and amongst the young people, under investigation. In both instances an approach that attributed risk and abuse to individuals, as opposed to the interplay between context and individual, meant that much of this harm was either not addressed or not disrupted.

Witnesses and complainants were intimidated in school and neighbourhoods. Intimidation delayed investigations and resulted in witnesses withdrawing information or refusing to provide full statements. In the seven examples of this in the files, parents informed the police that they would not permit their young person to provide evidence out of concern for their safety in school and in the neighbourhood. Parental concerns regarding safety seem warranted given evidence of both online and offline abuse of bystanders who agreed to support investigations:

B10 was threatened online by multiple individuals, following the service of papers to the defendants, – scared that he would be ‘seriously assaulted’. (Case 1, rape, witness)

(8G4) was punched in the face by a girl in her year for spreading rumours. (Case 8, murder, friend of complainant)

In one rape case the following individuals were relocated for their own safety following repeated threats of violence:

- a young man who intervened and provided evidence
- two young women who saw the video of the incident and provided evidence
- the complainant and members of her family.

As initially identified in chapter 12, a lack of intervention in fields beyond the home, and an implied resolve that such fields could not be altered, resulted in relocation being used to achieve physical safety.

Additionally, while all rape complainants gave evidence, it took time for them to agree to do so. All six young women were threatened by peers during the investigation process and on two occasions threats were made by female siblings of suspects. Complainant families were threatened in two thirds of the cases. In three cases complainants were physically assaulted by other young people (not those directly involved in the case) in a bid to get them to withdraw statements:

G1 (complainant) was assaulted outside school (7 months after initial incident and during waiting for the committal hearing).

Assaulted by a group of females who dragged her outside the home of G14 [suspect] 'this is the slag that cried rape'. ...G1 told her mum that she had been kicked in the face and her glasses had been broken. (Case 3)

In all cases, those who threatened complainants embodied the harmful gendered norms that underlined the abusive incidents in question and remained within the fields upon which they were dependent during investigation (be it peer group, school or neighbourhood – and families for siblings of suspects). While all complainants were relatively safe in their homes during the investigation period (asides from capacity to parent issues that were largely associated to fields beyond the home) those who were threatened continued to be abused within their peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods. Yet there is little evidence that such risk formed part of the assessment process (as outlined in sub-section 14.5).

In addition to retaliation and threats, in eight out of the nine cases the investigation process surfaced evidence that suggested other young people had been, or were, vulnerable to abuse.

In five out of the six rape investigations other young women were named as having been harmed by one/all of the male suspects. The behaviour of the suspects, their language, or the nature of the environment within which the abuse took place, implied that the objectification and abuse of young women was normative to their peer network:

1B1 (suspect) said 'If you carry on like G4 (other young woman) you are going to get the same as her' G1 (complainant) knew that G4 had been badly beaten, and (During the rape) another boy said 'the one we done in (a different local authority area) was good'. (Case 1)

May have happened previously with other girls as a number of [used] condoms identified in the property. (Case 2)

DNA identified on 5B1 (suspect) mattress – girl approached as also of school age (13/14 years old) ... known suspect since year 7 and was his ex-girlfriend – had stayed over at his house. (Case 5)

In only two cases were these suggestions followed up beyond an initial enquiry. Some approaches were made when people were identified, in the main to assist the investigation. However these young women invariably refused to cooperate due to fear of reprisals, as articulated in the following statement:

'I'm scared, I'll put my mum in danger...I can move on from this but can't put family in danger'. (Case 5)

Beyond examples such as this, there was little evidence in the files of substantial follow-up to identify and provide support for any additional harm experienced by young people within the abusive fields under investigation.

In two of the murder cases, other offences were committed within the suspect group including physical and sexual abuse. These experiences influenced the behaviour of suspects and bystanders leading up to, during, and after the offence in question. In addition, in at least a third (34%) of



cases suspects implied that loyalty to their peer group, that was sometimes predicated upon gendered power imbalances between young men as well as between young women and young men (explored in chapter ten), contributed to their engagement in the abusive incidents:

1G1 (complainant) asked one of the boys 1B7 (suspect) for help who she knew but he said he had to stick with his boys....1B7 offered to walk her home after he had assaulted her....1B7 overheard saying he 'wish he hadn't done it'. (Case 1, rape)

There was little evidence in the files that power imbalances between suspects were addressed by professionals. Neither was the harm that may have arisen within the peer group as a consequence of coercion. In a sense they were perceived as side issues to the incident under investigation.

Instead, case file evidence indicates that professionals narrowly focused on the behaviours of individuals associated to the original investigation, and responded to risk via the management of those individuals.

- Restrictions were placed on contact between suspects, as well as between suspects and complainants, to address risk within peer groups.
- In eight of the nine cases young people were moved to different schools as means of managing risk posed in that field.
- Four of the six rape cases, and two murder cases, involved neighbourhood relocation to manage risk.

All of these approaches to risk management were exemplified in Case 3:

Example: Following the sexual assault on school premises the complainant stays away from school for two weeks. Upon her return, she is kept away from suspects prior to charge. Following charge attempts are made to keep all suspects out of school but this cannot be implemented, so bail conditions forbid contact between all

suspects. The complainant is physically assaulted in school by other students in a bid to get her to withdraw her statement and as a result she moves and leaves the school before the trial commences.

Following the trial two of the suspects are incarcerated. No changes are made to the school environment during this time period.

In short: rather than create safe environments, and challenge the harmful, gendered rules that dominated the social fields in question, complainants were moved out of them. The fields remained unsafe and continued to pose a risk to all of those who interacted with them but fell outside of the investigation in question.

#### **14.8 No Further Action case**

An inability to conceptualise and respond to young people's behaviour with reference to the fields in which that behaviour occurred was most starkly exemplified in the one case that did not proceed to prosecution. In this case, the credibility of the young woman, as opposed to her allegation, was called into question. The justification given for this decision was as follows:

[We] would be asking the jury to 'make a decision between two conflicting versions that may be of equal merit'...**Witnesses to physical assaults refused to give evidence...Inconsistencies in account** – going to retrieve oyster card then this changes to going to retrieve mobile phone...4G1 goes to a bedroom without question...**Issues regarding credibility** as she admits to lying about an incident to a youth offending service worker and blaming someone else for an assault ... states that 4G1 'willingly went to the house' '**voluntarily gone to meet him and consented, albeit unwillingly, to full vaginal sex.....**this would make **4G1 aged 12**, this appears to fit into the middle of the events that she describes...it **does portray her as a person who is prepared to consent to sex albeit grudgingly**'...Robbery offences on her record – **these are**

**offences of ‘dishonesty’ she also has a record of violence towards another girl...**[social media] contains four references that **she is ‘sexually aware’ they are written in a ‘bragging tone, not one of sorrow or anger’...**Picked out in identity parade but not weighty as **she knows them all quite well anyway...**CAF makes reference to 4G1 **‘bringing boys back to the home’...**4G1 did not voluntarily go to the police with her allegation and is spoken to following a disclosure from another victim...She admits to carrying weapons and drugs for the boys involved for fear of retribution...The case cannot process to charge ‘due to lack of evidence. There is no evidence that sex took place. Parts of her evidence raise questions (and if this case were to proceed, I would ask for those questions to be put to her). Surrounding evidence of violence cannot be used. She has credibility issues. The defendants do not make any admissions. (Bold added by author)

The way in which this case was conceptualised raises a number of challenges with how some professionals understood abuse between young people in the files. Firstly, when abuse occurs amongst peers it is likely that the complainant will know suspects yet this was cited as making it difficult to proceed. Secondly, inconsistency in accounts was given as a reason for not proceeding, yet complainant confusion is likely when abuse occurs over a number of months and disclosure happens much later. Finally, regardless that 4G1 was 12 years old at the time of the abuse and by law there should be no defence in terms of consent she is described as ‘consenting’. This misapplication of the definition of consent is further compounded by the fact that the complainant is described as having consented ‘unwittingly’ - surely this is not consent at all?

This account exemplifies an application of gendered and age-specific stereotypes to the behaviours of young women and young men, in the absence of any recognition of the gendered and age-specific contexts in which these behaviours occurred. The references that I have put in bold

are used by the professional to imply that the complainant consented, or at the least is unreliable and not an ideal 'victim'. These same references, however, can be read as a description of an abusive peer group: in which other young people were afraid to seek help; where young women were drawn into offending and violent behaviours; and in which sexual abuse formed part of the social rules to which the group operated.

Conceptualised in this way the account offered describes a young woman, who was 12 years old at the time, making choices within a hegemonically masculine and coercive environment. She was compliant with the rules of that environment and did not challenge them, displaying 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 2001). She was not, however, consenting. A failure to contextualise the complainant's behaviours limited the ability of this professional to understand that her displays of agency were restricted by the gendered and age-informed boundaries of her social fields and did not negate her dependency on others for protection.

#### **14.9 Interventions with individuals and social fields**

Running alongside the investigation process, case files recorded some evidence of interventions. As outlined previously, interventions were largely targeted at complainants and their homes, with little attention paid to other fields, suspects or witnesses. However, individual and field interventions that were recorded are outlined here in order to consider the extent to which they helped or hindered the investigation process.

##### ***Interventions with individuals***

Across all nine cases individual complainants and/or their families received some form of intervention. Counselling was most common - offered to all six rape complainants. In addition, a support programme on relationships, negotiating skills and self esteem was offered in Case 5 and mental health interventions were made in four cases.

Beyond support, three complainants were disrupted through family re-location (case 1) or being placed into foster care provision (cases 4 and

5); four complainants were also moved into different schools. None of the complainants were placed on a child protection plan as a result of the investigation; although two had been on one in the years prior to the abusive incident as a result of risk in the home.

The professional response to suspects was predominantly rooted in the criminal justice system. Of the 76 suspects, 91% were arrested, 71% were charged, 58% were convicted - the same percentage of whom were incarcerated. No suspects were put on a child protection plan as a result of the investigations.

Beyond six instances of relocation, files contain no evidence of long-term interventions being offered to young people who were witnesses.

In addition to the above, there is some record of voluntary sector interventions, within the files, delivered by both women's and young people's services. The voluntary sector was predominantly engaged in two ways. Firstly, they delivered 1:1 support to five rape complainants following a disclosure. Secondly, mentoring services were used for suspects prior to the abusive incident in Cases 1, 3, 6 and 7, and for a complainant post abuse but pre-disclosure in Case 5. In the case of suspects, however, mentoring was employed in a bid to address their generally disruptive behaviours rather than having any association to peer-on-peer abuse specifically. There is no evidence in the files that an assessment process informed the allocation of mentors to the young men in question, or that the mentoring in any way addressed the drivers of HSB that was identified during the escalatory period.

Albeit limited, individual interventions were far more common than those targeted at the social contexts which were associated to the abusive incidents.

### ***Interventions in the home***

Evidence on the nature of the homes associated with the nine cases, documented in chapter nine, indicates that they were the most consistently safe fields to which young people were associated. The homes of suspects who led the abusive incidents presented the most harm. Therefore, it would be expected that home-based interventions would have focused on the homes of lead suspects. Yet, evidence on interventions demonstrates that this was not so for the cases in question.

Families of suspects received little intervention as a result of the investigation and for the most part these fields remained unchanged. In eight of the nine cases where information is available, save the offer of parenting classes pre-abusive incident, there is little evidence that families of suspects received support:

6B1 mother than rang back crying and asking for help with 6B1 and school suggested Positive Parenting Classes provided by the school. The next ones were happening 5 months after the call. (Case 6, suspect's parent)

This is despite the fact that 25% of these parents had asked for help and there was evidence that close to half (46%) were struggling to keep suspects safe from harm. In one instance a suspect was placed into care in the weeks following the abusive incident under investigation:

Merlins<sup>38</sup> indicate that 1B1 is repeatedly locked out of his house when he gets home later [than agreed]. Mother reports that she can no longer cope with him. 1B1 phones the police when his mother locks him out two nights in a row; ... he is reported to have been 'cold, shivering and wet' when they attended to him. Social services were called and he was taken into care (this is a two months after the sexual offence, and while 1B1 has been charged and bailed pending the court case). (Case 1)

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<sup>38</sup> Technical name given to police missing reports

In this instance, the suspect was taken into care as a result of their parent's inability to manage risk outside of the home, despite evidence that the young person was also at risk within his family environment. The lack of interventions within the homes of suspects resulted in at least 43% experiencing harm in the home environment during the investigation period. A quarter (24%) of these homes had been impacted by domestic violence and an equal number had featured intra-familial child protection issues (24%), illustrated in the following extracts:

Police raise concerns around the state of the house being 'unhygienic and squalid with evidence of mice. The children have no bedding'. States that the 'mother appears unable to cope and has learning difficulties'. (Case 7, suspect's home a year prior to the offence, and continued to be this way during the offending period and leading up to his trial)

1B6 – repeat missing young person [pre and post offence] and family known to be gang associated through other siblings. [While charged and bailed for rape] he witnessed the murder of his brother and family reported being concerned of his mental well being as a result of this. (Case 1, suspect)

It is clear from these extracts that despite the homes of some suspects being associated with their pathway to the abusive incident, interventions did not respond to this association.

Compared to suspects far more attention was paid to the homes of complainants. Although a third were in safe and supportive homes at the point of the abusive incident, all complainant families received support. Initially this was intervention to ensure that parent/carers were able to support their child, or to manage following bereavement, and involved children's social care and mental health interventions.

In addition to support, three cases involved complainant families being disrupted through relocation or care orders. Such decisions were not about the complainant being at risk in the home environment. Parental capacity was assessed with reference to carers being unable to safeguard young people from risk external to the home:

4G1's mother did state that she wanted 4G1 back living with her but not want to live in [the local area] due to 4G1's involvement with gangs previously. 4G1's brother has not been allowed to return to school as his mother fears for his safety. (Case 4, complainant family)

It seems that where harm within the home may have featured on the pathway towards the abusive incident, little intervention was made. Where the home was being impacted by fields external to it, intervention focused on the home and not the environments that were posing a risk.

### ***Interventions with peer groups***

Given that the peer group was identified as the most 'harmful' social field for the cases in my study, it may appear positive that it was also the field which received the greatest amount of intervention. However, in all cases the peer group experienced intervention in the form of disruption as opposed to support. In the main this was through the use of restrictions on suspects having contact with one another as part of their bail conditions. There is no evidence in any of the files that the peer group was supported to challenge harmful gendered norms to become pro-social, safe and supportive. The examples of positive peer influence amongst bystanders was not enhanced or built upon as a means of intervention. As a result, in cases where information was available (n=6), evidence indicates that the peer group reformed following the abusive incident and harm continued; this is the same for both suspects and complainants:

4B5 continued to offend following this investigation ... suspected of a murder alongside 4B4 and 4B7 and accused of supplying crack in



test purchase two weeks later....4B6 continued to offend following this investigation – found in possession of an 8 inch blade while attending the youth offending service; suspected of group-based GBH including stabbing a young man in the buttocks alongside 4B7 - the young man refused to assist police claiming that ‘it’s life’. (Case 4, rape, peer network)

7B8 and 7B11: [suspected of attempted murder] chased [a young man] into a communal area of a block of flats after he had been stabbed in the chest. (Case 7, murder, originally followers within the peer network)

5G1 went missing from foster care (with peer network) and in the debrief, ‘5G1 disclosed that she is unhappy at the placement and at risk. She was very very upset. 5G1 stated that she has received several phone calls from one of the boys who had previously raped her who had only received six months in prison. He told her people were after her. The school have apparently told social services about this but apparently they have said there is nothing they can do, that they cannot move someone ‘just like that’. (Case 5, complainant peer network)

In some cases where the peer network has not reformed some suspects remain incarcerated; it is not possible to know whether these will also reform once suspects are released from custody.

### ***Interventions with schools***

Despite harmful and gendered norms/behaviours within schools being associated to an abusive incident in eight out of nine cases, there is only one example of an attempt to change the cultural context of a school in the aftermath of an abusive incident:

One college worked to continue education (of suspects) and learn from the incident – offering support to the rest of the student

population (wanted to know why no one had disclosed what was planned)...Headmaster of the college had lost a pupil and had suspects.... (The headmaster had learnt that professionals) weren't passing information onto head of the school from local authorities (about some of the suspects who had been particularly vulnerable). (Case 7)

Whereas there is evidence that in two thirds of the cases harm continued in the school environments associated to the abusive incidents:

3G1 [complainant] had also been threatened that she would not make it court and believed that she would be 'killed' if she did. The school had been informed about this in addition to ongoing complaints of bullying. When 3G1 was spoken to she stated that if the police were involved she believed it would make things worse. (Case 3)

6G2, 6G3 and B62 were approached for statements....they were 'afraid of local gangs and problems that would arise at school'... (the complainant) states that 'a lot of people (in school) know about it. But they don't know it was not at my own will, but they go on about it like I wanted it'. (Case 6, response of school peer network)

Evidence of school struggling during the investigation ... evidence of an escalation in vulnerability and fights/bullying within school linked to this case...8G3 [friend of murdered young woman] victimisation within the home continues and there is evidence of abuse within the peer network as well. In addition 8G3 begins involvement in offending and is suicidal a year later. (Case 8)

In general, interventions with schools, as a result of the abusive incidents, were rare, or at least not recorded as part of the safeguarding plan during the investigation period.

### ***Interventions in neighbourhoods***

There is no evidence of interventions to either address the hegemonically masculine gender relations within the neighbourhood in which the abuse took place or the continued impact of this on residents. Nonetheless, police data shows that young people in the case files continued to experience harm within the neighbourhood following the investigation in seven cases:

8G3 followed home with a friend by a group of females when getting off a bus. The group demanded money before pinning 8G3 to a wall and taking her purse from her bag... 8B7 – whilst with friends is chased by a group of 15 males who attacked him with their belts and also kicked and punched him. (Case 8, peers of murdered young woman)

The conviction and/or relocation of young people across the nine case files did not create safety in the neighbourhoods within which abusive incidents occurred. In six cases the peers of the complainants or suspects, who were bystanders to the abusive incident, experienced ongoing harm within the fields. When young people were relocated they didn't take the harm with them. Rather a vacuum was created within which other young people experienced physical and sexual abuse. For example: the murder of two young people in the same location as the rape in Case 1 and the ongoing physical and sexual abuse of students in school in Cases 3, 6 and 8.

### ***Interventions – conclusion***

Evidence of interventions suggests that, like the assessment process, support in the nine cases was targeted at complainants and their homes in the absence of interventions which effectively addressed harmful gendered norms and behaviour within associated fields. Furthermore interventions, like assessments, failed to appreciate the interplay between

fields and the individuals with whom they were engaging, and therefore were not complimentary to the investigation process.

#### **14.10 Impact and Outcomes**

The abusive incidents and the nature of the professional response to them impacted young people within the nine cases. Outcomes were influenced by: the individual young people involved; the social environments within which they lived; the interplay between those two and the ways in which professionals responded to that interaction.

All nine complainants were negatively impacted by the abusive incident. Three of the nine were murdered, and of the remaining six young people there was evidence that:

- five showed signs of emotional distress
- three were suicidal after the abuse
- five were recorded as 'truanting'
- at least four self-harmed
- at least two went on to commit violent offences
- all had ongoing mental health needs after the abusive incident
- all experienced ongoing harm or threats within the peer group, school and wider social environment.

In the files, less attention was paid as to whether the abusive incident had a negative impact on suspects. Where information was available on police systems, it indicated that following the abusive incidents of the 76 suspects:

- 8% were suicidal
- 5% self-harmed
- 25% were emotionally distressed
- 57% 'truanted' from school
- 24% were recorded as having ongoing mental health needs

- 26% experienced ongoing harm and threats to their personal safety and well-being.

For some, issues such as truancy were already present prior to the abusive incident, as outlined in chapter five. It is important to note, however, that an investigation, and in some cases conviction, did not necessarily reduce the risk that suspects posed to others or to themselves.

Little is known about the impact of the cases on the 45 witnesses. This is mainly because information was only collected in the case files that furthered the investigation. To that extent, their testimony was the main reason for including them in the files; beyond this their experiences were of less relevance to the case. However, where follow-up information on witnesses was available it demonstrated that following the abusive incident at least:

- four young people were suicidal and three self-harmed
- eleven showed signs of emotional distress
- seven were recorded as 'truanting' from school
- five young people experienced ongoing harm or threats beyond the abusive incident
- two were involved in ongoing offending.

In the vast majority of cases, these were not behaviours that were recorded prior to the abusive incident, with the exception of truanting.

Accounts provided by young people who were witnesses implied that they had been significantly affected by the abusive incident in question, particularly those whose peers were murdered:

'I told my mum I thought I knew something awful'. (Case 9, bystander who struggled emotionally following a murder)

At the school there are ongoing issues regarding the recent [murder]. The victim of the (murder) was 8G6 friend. The mother's daughter

was the girlfriend of a suspect and has been spoken to the police about the incident. As such tension at the school is very high. Rumours at the school are rife and some students are being blamed for informing the police of suspects and witnesses names. (Case 8)

In terms of outcomes, police data indicated that the victimisation of some complainants continued and/or escalated, as did their involvement in harming others:

(since the convictions) 5G1 – has been raped on repeated occasions since, continues to go missing, has sustained physical injuries, is associated with others who use drugs and weapons....(According to police reports) 5G1 went missing from foster care. When 5G1 returned she disclosed that her and her friends had gone to a party with some boys... The next day another boy arrived and asked if she wanted to celebrate her birthday by having sex with him. She said no but he vaginally raped her anyway. She did not stop him as this is something that happens in the gang culture that she mixes with. 5G1 has refused to co-operate with police. (Case 5)

School records show that 6G1 becomes depressed in school, cries and writes on her books that she wants to die. On one occasion she is also verbally abusive to the teacher. (Case 6)

Although convictions were achieved in their cases, the complainants in the above examples remained vulnerable in the social fields in which they were abused. Abusive behaviours, and the harmful gendered norms that underpinned them, in the school in Case 6, and the peer group in Case 5, persisted even after the individual complainants were supported and suspects convicted.

In addition to ongoing victimisation, a third of suspects were recorded as having continued to commit offences (Table 48). Total levels of desistence cannot be presented at this stage as a number of suspects remain in custody at the point of writing.

Evidence of ongoing harm experienced by young people in the files implies that, successful outcomes in terms of individual convictions did not always equate safeguarding and/protecting complainants.

#### **14.11 Summary findings: how professionals responded**

This chapter has outlined the evidence of the professional response to nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse, finding that:

1. Despite periods of escalation, abusive incidents occurred, and disclosures were generally made, before professionals identified harm.
2. Multi-agency working, assessment and intervention was inconsistent and, when it occurred, was used to manage the investigation and individual young people, largely complainants, rather than to address the fields to which the abuse was associated.
3. The evidence gathering process was almost exclusively focused outside of the home, in recognition that these were the spaces where the abuse occurred.
4. The discord between the sites of investigation and the sites of assessment/intervention contributed to the investigation process both incurring delays and generating further risk to those associated with the cases.
5. Decision-making regarding assessments of, and intervention for, individuals, often employed gendered and age-specific stereotypes, without recognising the gendered and age-specific contexts in which their behaviours had occurred.
6. Harm beyond the incident under investigation was identified in eight cases, and yet this harm was not included in assessments or interventions. These instances of harm were characteristic of the fields in which the abusive incident had occurred, but the fields were not the focus of the investigation or intervention.

7. A failure to contextualise both the warning signs during escalation and the abusive incident resulted in some professionals conceptualising young people's agency as them making risky choices rather than navigating risky spaces.
8. Interventions that were offered generally comprised of counselling and relocation for complainants, youth justice and school sanctions for suspects, and relocation for witnesses.
9. The social field that received the most attention was that of the peer group. However it was managed through disruption and the use of bail conditions, rather than through the challenging of harmful gender norms and the building of pro-social and safe peer groups.
10. Although the homes of suspects appeared far more consistently and extensively harmful than those of complainants it was the latter set of families that received most intervention.
11. Relocation was prioritised as a means of achieving physical safety, over any attempt to intervene with, and make safe, an entire social space.
12. Although eight of the nine investigations resulted in convictions they did not necessarily safeguard the young people involved.

Despite the potential gaps in the documented evidence of the professional response to these cases (chapter five), the information indicates that the safeguarding responses employed in the nine cases broadly consisted of four key components: identification, assessment, and intervention as outlined in Figure 11, supported through ad hoc multi-agency working.



	Individual young person	Family
<b>Identification</b>	Identify that a young person has been abused by, or is abusing, their peers	N/A
<b>Assessment<sup>39</sup></b>	Assessment of the young person who has been abused in terms of their behaviours and attitudes	Assessment of the home to establish the capacity of the parent to safeguard a young person from further abuse outside of the home
		Assessment of the home to establish the capacity of the parent to control a young person to prevent them from abusing others outside of the home
<b>Intervention</b>	Counselling and relocation for the young person who has been abused	For the complainant family: relocation, voluntary accommodation of the complainant and/or counselling
	Criminal justice and/or school based sanctions for the suspect	For the suspect family: parenting classes
	Relocation of young people who were witnesses to the abusive incident	

**Figure 11 Identification, assessment and intervention in the case files**

The following chapter will consider these four components with reference to the socio-cultural account of the nine cases developed in this thesis.

<sup>39</sup> With reference to these components, chapters two, three, and four also identified the availability of other interventions and assessments that are not referenced in the case files. These include: the use of multi-systemic therapy to work with the whole family of young people affected by abuse; the AIM2 assessment for young people with sexually harmful behaviours; sexual exploitation assessments; and the domestic abuse stalking and harassment tool (DASH).

## **15. Discussion: the professional response to the nine cases**

In light of the socio-cultural account of nine peer-on-peer abuse cases offered in this thesis, there are three key ways to examine the four components of safeguarding outlined in the previous chapter:

- The extent to which responses assessed or intervened with the interplay between social field and individual agency
- The ability of responses to change the social conditions in which abuse
- The level of professional recognition of socially constructed parameters of culpability and consent.

The recorded professional response was hindered by a failure to consistently conceptualise the abusive incidents with reference to the gendered and age-specific nature of the fields in which they occurred. While the police investigation drew evidence from fields external to the home, the assessments and interventions associated to that investigation failed to recognise the significance of social norms and behaviours within peer groups, schools, and neighbourhoods. Considering individual behaviours abstracted from the social context in which they occurred runs counter to the socio-cultural account of the nine cases developed in this thesis. In particular, assessment and intervention failed to accommodate the reflexive, multi-way interplay between individuals and fields identified within the nine cases.

In abstracting behaviours from social fields, assessments (while gender neutral in theory) were used in the case files to interpret the behaviours of young people in a stereotypically gendered manner. For example: harm

caused by young men's sexualised behaviour was under-recognised while the young women who were abused were perceived as risky and deviant (evidenced in sub-section 14.5). In these instances professionals reproduced the harmful gendered norms which the young people themselves were embodying. More importantly, there is no evidence that assessments recognised the ways in which social fields informed young people's choices. An acknowledgement that young people had formed, and were developing, identities within hegemonically masculine fields was absent in the files. As a result these gendered behaviours were viewed as non-gendered, harmful, irrational choices by individual young people, rather than arguably rational responses to harmful, gendered, social environments.

As a result of the above limitation, individual agency was over-emphasised in professional responses accompanied by a failure to recognise the change in social conditions required for the generative capacity of the habitus to be realised. This was particularly true in examples of young men who were told to act differently in the absence of any change in the fields with which they were interacting. The fact that responses to the abusive incidents / escalation made little attempt to alter fields left individual agency even more constrained than it needed to be. For example, had hegemonically masculine hierarchies, which determined safety, within suspect's neighbourhoods or witnesses' schools been addressed, it is possible that these young men may have acted differently. In the absence of such change some witnesses refused to assist investigations and some suspects continued to offend.

Ultimately the safeguarding response to risk in the nine cases insisted on locating harm back in the home. The choices that young people made beyond the home environment were not contextualised as occurring in spaces in which children's social care had a safeguarding role. An inability to intervene in an age appropriate way was also evidenced by professional responses to 'agency'. When young people displayed agency, whether

they were being abused or abusing others, this was used to negate any dependency that they may have had on others to keep them safe. Rather than consider what responsibility they had to protect suspects, some professionals responded to them as simply culpable for their abusive behaviours, demonstrated through the use of school and criminal justice sanctions. The behaviour of rape complainants was also conceptualised as young women *putting* themselves at risk, rather than navigating risky environments that professionals had a responsibility to make safe.

Associated to the above discussion, the way in which suspects, complainants, and witnesses engaged in acts of symbolic violence was also misunderstood by professionals in the case files. When suspects were charged with offences there was little recorded recognition of the interplay between their behaviours and the ‘harmful’ homes and neighbourhoods in which they lived – exemplified by the fact that they were bailed back to those addresses without support pre-trial. The closest that the response got to recognising the impact of social fields was the use of relocation. However, this was only associated to complainants and witnesses. The fields themselves were unchanged – still interplaying with those who remained within them. Evidence of positive bystanders, who challenged harmful social norms, was not embraced as a sign of resilience – a strength to be harnessed as a catalyst for change. The use of relocation implied that the fields themselves would not change and arguably reinforced the justification for those who remained within them to engage in symbolic violence as means of realising safety. While these cases were taken through safeguarding and criminal justice systems and were responded to by professionals, they did not create safety for all complainants or for the majority of suspects and witnesses.

The three practical limitations outlined in this chapter are associated with the traditional parameters of safeguarding practice which, as chapter four illustrated, is:

- designed to respond to risk within the home

- constructed upon notions of dependency and not agency
- gender neutral.

A focus on individual choice in the files resulted in some professionals drawing upon examples of young people's behaviour and agency as demonstrative of consent or culpability, rather than giving any consideration to the context in which their individual identities and choices had been formed.

In total, these findings indicate that nine responses from 2007 - 2012 failed to safeguard young people affected by peer-on-peer abuse. While only nine cases, it is unlikely that they are unrepresentative, given that they echo and progress concerns raised in the literature chapters. In light of the socio-cultural account of the abusive incidents, the limitations in the responses are not surprising. It is evident that despite literary evidence and emerging intervention that indicates the contrary, the reflexive interplay between fields and young people are yet to be recognised in practice. The response to the incidents under examination conceptualised the abuse in absence of these structural and social relationships, misplacing assessments and interventions as a result.

Having considered both the nature of peer-on-peer abuse and the professional response to it, in nine cases, five key themes have emerged:

- contextualised accounts of vulnerability and harm
- gendered roles, relations and responses
- 'age' constructed through agency and dependency
- 'safety' as a spectrum and motor of human action
- a multi-faceted categorisation of peer-on-peer abuse.

The following chapter will explore these themes before the thesis concludes by outlining the safeguarding implications for policy, practice and research of the socio-cultural conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse proposed by this study.

## **16. Discussion: thematic points for consideration**

### **16.1 Introduction**

In exploring the nature of nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse, and the professional response to them, particular themes have emerged which have implications for safeguarding policy and practice. The interplay between fields and social agents, the generative capacity of the habitus to enact social change, and the embodiment of social rules via symbolic violence, are evidenced through:

- contextualised accounts of vulnerability and harm
- gendered roles, relations and responses
- ‘age’ constructed through agency and dependency
- ‘safety’ as a spectrum and motor of human action
- a multi-faceted categorisation of peer-on-peer abuse.

This chapter will consider each of these themes in turn before posing a question regarding ‘ethnicity’. Drawing upon this thematic discussion, and the findings of previous chapters, the following chapter will conclude the thesis by outlining the implications of my study for safeguarding policy, practice and research.

### **16.2 Contextualised accounts of vulnerability and harm**

In applying Bourdieusian social theory to nine investigations into peer-on-peer rape or murder a clear story emerges about the interplay between individuals and contexts during abusive periods; a relationship insufficiently recognised, and sometimes missed completely, in the documented safeguarding responses. By recognising interplay between agency and field, this thesis provides an account of peer-on-peer abuse in

which assessments and interventions individualise risks that are also environmental while:

- vulnerability is contextualised
- social rules are transferred between environments through professionals and young people
- a reciprocity of harmful gender norms are established between the contexts upon which young people are dependent, entrenching hegemonically masculine gender relations.

That 145 young people featured in this study did not share an individual characteristic, experience or behaviour that could ‘predict’ the likelihood of them being abused by, or abusing, their peers, demonstrates the importance of contextualising vulnerability. While some complainants had biographies which arguably made them vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse, i.e. the complainant in Case 5 (rape) was sexually abused from infancy (in keeping with pre-existing literary evidence) there was no record that others, such as complainants in cases 2 and 6 (both rape cases), had any such recorded characteristics, behaviours or experiences. A comparison of murder cases 7 and 9 also shows that while one complainant had extensive victimisation in their history, whereas none had been recorded for the other. A lack of consistent biographies was replicated within the suspect cohort. While they had more extensive histories of victimisation and lengthier missing periods than the complainant group as a whole, such experiences still only applied to some, not all, of this group.

Chapter by chapter, a contextualised examination of nine abusive incidents enabled this thesis to move beyond an account of individual characteristics and behaviours abstracted from the environments in which they became ‘vulnerabilities’. It was not necessarily the case that the young woman in Case 5, abused as an infant, would go on to be abused by her peers: but a narrative of that historical experience in the home, interplayed with peer group and school environments that reinforced hegemonically masculine relations between young men, produced a more

contextual narrative for abuse. In keeping with the critiques examined in previous chapters (i.e. Brodie, 2013), it seems that rather than use individual vulnerabilities as predictors of peer-on-peer abuse, it may be more helpful to consider vulnerabilities (and their absence) in relation to the social fields with which they interact.

Such an approach seems warranted given evidence of rule transference between the contexts featured in the nine cases, and the resulting entrenchment of hegemonically masculine hierarchies and abusive social norms. Despite the influential weight and nature of peer group norms documented in chapters 10 and 13, this field had limited, documented contact with safe fields that promoted alternative social rules.

Evidence on young people's homes suggested that while parents sought to safeguard their individual young people, who predominantly followed the lead of others, the extent to which this would have influenced those who led, and the group as a whole, was arguably limited. Leaders, who exerted the most influence within the peer groups, were informed by reinforcing rather than challenging social rules within their homes when exposed to domestic abuse, harmful gender norms and abusive behaviours.

Rather than establish an interplay of challenge, whereby the individual social agents, and peer groups, came up against discordant rules within the field of the school, the relationship between students and school cultures in the files was largely reflexive and reproductive. Hegemonically masculine hierarchies were unaddressed and safety was not realised in the majority of schools featured. As a result school provided an extended conducive context in which abusive incidents, and to a greater extent abusive peer groups, could exist.

Finally, a reflexive and reinforcing interplay between the agency of the suspects and the rules of the neighbourhoods was also documented in the files. Consideration of hegemonically masculine hierarchies within



neighbourhoods enabled the nature of abuse within the featured peer groups to be sufficiently understood. While some schools reinforced the harmful ideals of peer groups, and some suspects were exposed to harm in, and pushed out of, their homes, the levels of fear and lack of safety within neighbourhoods best illuminated the perceived need of suspects to continually assert their status and power in the files.

The reciprocity of harm created when abusive norms went unchallenged in schools, or were transferred into homes by individual young people, significantly lacked attention by a professional response, documented in chapters 14-15, that focused on changing individual complainant behaviour (or their physical location). Professional responses to young people's agency in chapter seven, and the assessments and interventions documented in chapter 14, evidence safeguarding practices which failed to locate risk within field interplay and, as a result, harmful social norms (and the abuse associated to them) persisted. Young people's behaviours were thought of independently, divorced from the vulnerabilities and social contexts to which they may have been associated, and perceptions of individual agency informed professional judgements on consent and culpability. Building upon Bourdieusian social theory, the evidence in this thesis suggests that the peer group as a whole field, and those who led in particular, needed to engage in and embody alternative rules in order to realise social change. A lack of peer group interaction with discordant social fields external to it may partly explain the limitations of bystander interventions, and the persisting risk following investigations, and even convictions, in the nine cases.

### **16.3 Gendered roles, relations and responses**

Beyond providing a contextual account of risk and vulnerability, the *interplay* between fields and agents evidences the gendered nature of the nine cases in question. While the individual characteristics of the 145 young people featured in the cases largely reiterate the evidenced trend that peer-on-peer abuse is gendered, a lens of constructivist structuralism

enables my study to both consider *why* this is the case and explain inconsistencies: young women featured as suspects in rape and murder cases, and young men were killed in two murder cases under examination. This thesis evidenced that peer-on-peer abuse is not simply gendered by virtue of the fact that most complainants were young women (all in the rape cases) or that most suspects were young men, but rather by the harmful gendered norms that underpinned their behaviours (and escalation towards them) and the hegemonically masculine gender relations of which these nine cases were both a cause and consequence. In this sense, there are two key ways in which gender is accounted for across the findings of my study: firstly in the identified norms of the featured fields and secondly in the nature of the professional response to the nine cases in question.

Chapters 6 – 13 offer an account of nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse where harmful gender norms are reciprocated across the social environments to which the incidents are associated. From the home, to the peer group, school and neighbourhood, hegemonically masculine gender relations are reproduced between:

- young men
- young men and young women
- professionals and young people
- parents/carers
- parents/carers, young people and professionals.

The most consistently identified form of abuse in the homes of the young people was domestic abuse of women by men. Through the presence of domestic abuse some homes operated to hegemonically masculine hierarchies, informing young people's understandings of relationships, gender identity, and sense of safety, in at least eight cases. The suggestion that, in keeping with the literature (Chung, 2005; Franklin, 2013), exposure to harm in the home was most pronounced for suspects who led abusive incidents is particularly relevant in this regard.

Harmful gendered norms were identified across all peer groups. Chapter 10 evidenced how suspect peer groups provided a physical audience for young men to engage in abusive performances in pursuit of hegemonically masculine status; progressing previous findings that peer groups afforded young men a discursive audience for hegemonically masculine performances (i.e. Holland et al., 1998). Such behaviours extended to young women's experiences of intimate partner violence, where young people's relationships were hosted by peer groups which, in the nine cases, engaged in a reflective and reinforcing endorsement of harmful gender relations. Even on occasions where complainant peer groups were distinct from suspect peer groups the former reinforced the gender norms of the latter (Case 6): rather than attempting to change the 'harmful' field to which they had been exposed, peers of complainants simply sought to navigate it.

Examples of social norm acceptance by non-abusive peer groups were also influenced by the school cultures in which such friendships formed. In keeping with the literature on gender norms in schools (Connell, 2002; Frosh et al. 2002; Light, 2007), Chapter 11 offers an account of school cultures where individual staff members and broader student populations: minimised sexual harassment; under-assessed the vulnerability of young men who were missing; and held young women responsible for the abuse that they experienced.

The exposure of young men to physical abuse in neighbourhoods, and a requirement that they protect themselves from robbery and intimidation, reinforced gendered stereotypes and maintained hegemonically masculine power relations once more. It is of note that the neighbourhoods featured in my study did not exist independently of broader society. Literature chapters evidenced the promotion of hegemonically masculine relations locally, regionally, and globally. It is helpful to consider suspects' engagement with neighbourhood-based abuse in this context. Arguably, when young men were physically abused in their local neighbourhoods,

stereotypical notions of their masculinity were undermined. Simultaneously evidence suggests that other fields these young men navigated, such as their peer groups and schools, failed to challenge these harmful ideals at best, and at worst were evidenced as reinforcing them. As such these young men were arguably powerless and unsafe in their local neighbourhoods, and lacked alternative spaces to develop less non-abusive identities without compromising their safety.

Professional responses documented in chapters 14-15 failed to recognise the gendered nature of both the abusive incidents and the contexts in which they occurred, while simultaneously applying gender stereotypes to individual behaviours. ‘Gangster’ (Cases 1, 5 and 9) young men could protect themselves when they went missing from home and young women were expected to protect themselves from sexually harmful young men in school (Cases 3, 4, 5 and 6). In utilising gender stereotypes while failing to recognise gendered risk and vulnerability, professionals in the nine cases overemphasised individual agency and under-emphasised their opportunities to safeguard young people.

Such practice left harmful social norms intact at best, and reinforced at worst (such as the explanation for the no further action decision in Case 4, sub-section 14.8). This layered reproduction of harmful gender norms in turn informed young people’s sense of power, identity, and agency, and therefore experiences of consent and culpability. Neither the nature of the fields upon which they were dependent in the nine cases, nor the professionals who responded to the abusive incidents, provided young people with alternative gendered societal narratives. Contrary to the young men in Light’s study (2007) who were afforded opportunities of resistance within alternative fields, individual young people in the case files sought to disrupt escalation within hegemonically masculine climates – limiting the extent to which they could safely effect change.

#### **16.4 Age determined by dependency and agency**

Like gender, the concept of age, and more specifically adolescence, is socially constructed and reconstructed in the nine cases through:

- interplays between young people, professionals, parents/carers and social fields
- the concepts of agency and dependency.

Tensions between the dependence of childhood and the independence of adulthood appear to influence two responses to peer-on-peer abuse: repeated professional references to a young person's 'choices' trumping their need for protection and young people attempting to secure their peers' safety without the assistance of adults.

In accordance with theories of childhood explored in chapter three, young people in the files demonstrated agency when developing identities outside of the home (sometimes in unsafe fields) and increasingly gained freedom from that environment. The influence of the peer group was the strongest for the majority of young people in the case files, often usurping the influence of the home at the point of the abusive incident (as was implied by the literature on adolescence presented in chapter three). As abusive peer groups began to form, young people who were followers exerted their agency by adopting the social norms of their peers and defying those of their families. In addition, bystanders attempted to manage the risk faced to, and posed by, their peers through intra-peer group negotiations and in the absence of professionals/parental support. In all cases, young people appeared to act in ways that they believed would achieve safety, but maintain peer acceptance, within hegemonically masculine fields.

Rather than recognising vulnerability and offering support, professionals responded to young people's choices by implying that their displays of agency had negated their dependency on others for their protection. Young women who were sexually exploited, and young men who ran from

home (or to the street), were perceived as making 'risky' choices, but choices nonetheless, for which they themselves were responsible. Such an approach reinforced young people's perceptions that they had to protect themselves, and did not encourage bystanders to seek support beyond the peer network.

Despite these responses to agency, evidence from the case files also indicates that young people were dependent upon professionals, parents/carers and their peers for their safety. Given the evidenced nature of the social fields in the nine cases, it follows that young people's 'choices' were being made in what were often unsafe contexts whose nature was largely beyond their control – particularly schools and neighbourhoods. While evidence of young people's agency supports Bourdieu's contention that they were not 'puppets' of social fields, it did not negate the fact that they were also dependent upon others to ensure that the environments in which they acted were safe.

Such was the persistent and entrenched nature of abuse within some peer groups that those who were part of them arguably engaged in forms of symbolic violence prior to, and during, the abusive incident. In doing so individuals indicated that they were social agents, but that their agency was constrained by the parameters of the field; they opted to act in accordance with the rules of the group as means of staying safe. Choices, vis-à-vis action, may not have been dictated by the social field, but the extent to which such choices challenged the status quo was limited by the social field. The lack of contextual assessment and intervention demonstrated across the nine cases indicates that professionals failed to recognise environmental dependence and consequently engaged in practices that were insufficient in enabling young people to make safer choices. For example, a complainant in Case 5 who experienced chronic sexual abuse in infancy, embodied the rules of the home field (which dictated that she was a sexual object to be abused by others) and conformed to them again within her school and peer group when she was

abused by her peers. Professionals recorded that the complainant behaved in a way that indicated she was 'sexually aware', however given the nature of her home, school and peer group the complainant's behaviour actually demonstrated the navigation of reinforcing harmful norms. By accounting for the complainant's agency abstracted from context professionals were unable to recognise a lack of consent.

Young people in the files depended upon professionals to ensure that the environments in which they displayed their agency were safe ones. Yet in failing to recognise interplay and struggling to accommodate a relationship between dependency and agency, professionals attempted to alter individual decisions (to realise safety) while failing to create safe environments: constructing childhood, and by default dependency, with reference to agency and not age.

### **16.5 Safety as a spectrum and motor of human action**

Critics of Bourdieu have questioned the extent to which status, within a given social field, is a universal motor of human action. In giving prominence to a pursuit of 'safety' amongst the young people in the case files, the findings of my study extend this critique. While it is evident that young people pursued status through the re/production of hegemonic gender relations a question remains as to whether the ultimate goal was safety, via status. Notions of safety appeared in the data in three ways, related to: consent and culpability; harm within social fields; and professional attempts to achieve safety through individual intervention.

Complainants, suspects and witnesses are all evidenced as engaging in acts of symbolic violence which sustained harmful social norms while supporting them to achieve some sense of safety. Such behaviour created a 'spectrum of safety' for young people across the nine cases. For example, complainants talked about not saying 'no' during a sexual assault to avoid physical violence. In such examples young women made constrained choices determined by the parameters of their field: they were

not consenting but they were seeking ‘safety’. Likewise, suspects who took part in the murder/rape of their peers verbalised being unable to turn against the peer group due to fear of physical violence and isolation. Bystanders failed to intervene during escalation periods in ways that would have compromised their physical safety – for example they counselled their friends against abusive behaviours but didn’t tell an adult for fear of reprisals or isolation. In all cases these behaviours sustained unsafe environments in the pursuit of individual (physical) safety.

The professional response in the nine cases mirrored the behaviour of young people. A focus on individual physical safety, through the use of relocation, trumped any attempt to achieve environmental safety and potentially compromised the relational and ontological safety of the young people who were moved (Shuker 2013). Use of relocation to achieve the physical safety of witnesses and complainants, gave the impression that the hegemonically masculine rules of the associated neighbourhoods were largely unalterable. Professional resolve that the neighbourhoods in question were essentially unsafe spaces was further accentuated on occasions where adults walked past abusive incidents and didn’t contact the police. This relatively deterministic view of safety within neighbourhoods is interesting when one considers the culpability of the suspects. If harm in the neighbourhood was so determined then to what extent were suspects, who had been harmed in the neighbourhood and embodied these experiences, culpable for being resigned to the idea that the situation wouldn’t change? Individualised responses simply served to locate safety within individuals’ behaviours/choices, whereas across the nine cases safety was located in the interplay between individuals and the environments that they navigated.

## **16.6 Multi-faceted categorisation of peer-on-peer abuse**

In analysing murder and rape files together under the employed definition of peer-on-peer abuse, this thesis has demonstrated two thematic findings



in relation to how the phenomenon is understood and categorised. Firstly, all incidents of peer-on-peer abuse in this study were informed by the behaviours that preceded them and the contexts in which they occurred: they were far more than the harm that one young person, or more, caused to another at an identified point in time. Secondly, offence labels such as ‘murder’ and ‘rape’, or categories such as child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, harmful sexual behaviour and serious youth violence often overlapped, and didn’t always capture the dynamics, breadth and diversity of the behaviours involved in the nine cases.

A layering of abusive behaviours was particularly evident during the escalation period: murder cases involved sexual, emotional, and less frequently financial abuse, prior to the final offence; sexual assaults were often preceded with emotional and physical abuse, creating a coercive environment in which the rape took place. The label given to the offences under investigation failed to capture the nature of all of the behaviours involved and the abusive norms which underpinned them.

It was also during the escalatory period that social field and agent interplay re/constructed gender and age power hierarchies, informing young people’s behaviours and the professional response toward them. Intersections between risk and norms in the neighbourhood, school, and peer group, and home, acted as points of escalation towards the abusive incident. All four need to be understood in order to conceptualise peer-on-peer abuse. However, abusive incidents were often conceptualised by professionals as instants/moments in time, rather than as something that was located within the broader ‘harmful’ environments explored in this thesis.

As well as questioning behaviour categories, the findings of my study also support the critiques of abuse definitions that utilise static victim/perpetrator identities. In the nine cases, data implies that most young people victimised others after they had been victimised themselves – hence suspects being victimised pre-offence while the onset of

complainant offending followed, or occurred alongside, their own experiencing of abuse. Although some complainants had also been abused in their homes before they were abused by their peers, it is the latter that appeared to trigger their own offending and abusive behaviour towards their peers.

As a result, this thesis has evidenced the overlapping behaviours that occurred within nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse and the challenge of ascribing these abusive behaviours to narrowly defined categories.

### **16.7 Ethnicity: an unanswered concern**

While not an initial area of consideration for my study, the ethnicity of complainants, suspects and witnesses in the nine cases requires some attention. That black and minority ethnic young people made up the majority of complainants, suspects, and a third of witnesses in the case files means very little in the absence of social context. Literature already cautions against the extent to which ethnicity data can be interpreted given the intersections between class, race, and gender (Franklin, 2013; Kelly, 2013; Lambine, 2013; Palmer and Pitts, 2006). The demographics of the fields in the files give an expectation that ethnic minority young people would feature in the abusive incidents in question. This is true of the police service area as whole, as well as the individual neighbourhoods in which the incidents occurred. For example: the rape in Case 1 occurred in a relatively diverse estate and the young people involved were equally diverse. Whereas the murder in Case 8 featured a number of South Asian young people who reflected the local population.

Arguably however, there is more to consider about the way in which ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ were perceived and reproduced in social fields – much of which is beyond the scope of my study. Literature on serious youth violence, poverty, and social exclusion, identifies the impact of the intersections of class, race, and gender on young ‘black’ men who seem disproportionately affected (Palmer and Pitts, 2006; Wacquant, 2008;

Young, 1999). Data on such intersections are limited in the case files as it would not necessarily have informed the investigations for which they were developed.

Nonetheless the rates of previous neighbourhood victimisation, exclusions from school and the impact of gang-association, on the young men in the case files reflects broader research on the social exclusion of young black men in Western countries (Franklin, 2013; Wacquant, 2008; Young, 1999). Many suspects, particularly those who assumed a leadership role, experienced physical abuse in schools and neighbourhoods, and were exposed to domestic abuse in their homes. Yet there is little evidence that they received support despite 25% of suspect's parents asking for help. Instead they were excluded from school (six cases) enforced against (seven cases), and placed on behaviour contracts within their neighbourhoods (four cases) in the years prior to the abusive incidents. The cases where this did not happen primarily involved South Asian young people (Case 8) and an online rather than offline initial contact (Case 2), rather than those that featured Black British, African, or African-Caribbean young people on the street. Such evidence asks questions of whether professional responses to ethnicity problematised rather than protected young people in the nine cases.

An exploration of the interplay between perceptions of ethnicity and the lack of protection outlined is beyond the parameters of this study and the data collected. However, given broader literary evidence of the treatment of young black men in the UK and the US, and the experiences of the largely black male suspect cohort in this study, ethnicity is an important matter for future research.

## **16.8 Conclusion**

A socio-cultural conceptualisation of nine peer-on-peer abuse cases, considered alongside professional responses to the issue, has surfaced a number of themes that have implications for safeguarding policy and

practice. Taken together they identify the need for a system which can realise safety by offering a contextualised response young people's gendered and age-specific experiences of peer-on-peer abuse. The following and final chapter of this thesis will propose the steps required to deliver such a system, and outline the implications for policy, practice and research in doing so.

## **17. Conclusion: the safeguarding implications of conceptualising peer-on-peer abuse within social fields**

### **17.1 Introduction**

By adopting a socio-cultural framework to analyse nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse my thesis set out to explore whether there is more to the phenomenon in question than abusive behaviours and individual characteristics of the young people involved. In adopting this methodology I sought to build upon existing evidence that peer-on-peer abuse was a gendered and age-specific phenomenon, associated to the nature of young people's peer groups, by exploring how these factors characterised the phenomenon. In short: what was the nature of the relationship between individual characteristics/behaviours and social contexts associated to peer-on-peer abuse and did this relationship matter?

Building upon a hypothesis that I developed in 2013, my in-depth study of peer-on-peer abuse incidents has met its objectives and through a constructivist structuralism lens has illustrated that, in these nine cases of murder and rape, the phenomenon:

- consisted of a multi-way reflexive interplay between hegemonically masculine and age-specific social fields and social agents, in which the parameters of consent and culpability were constructed and opportunities for social change were created or restricted
- was responded to through a policy and practice framework that investigated abuse within social fields external to the home, while largely individualising risk as abstracted from context through assessment and intervention.

The incidents in question undoubtedly involved the significant harm of young people and, as such, were clearly a child protection concern. However, unlike many traditional child protection issues, the abuse in these nine cases occurred, and were largely influenced by, matters beyond the home environment. This presents a challenge to the parameters of traditional child protection policy and practice that primarily focus on harm within the home.

Professionals in the files interrupted abusive incidents while abusive environments remain intact. Rather than making environments safe, some young people were moved out of unsafe environments while others remained at risk. Such practices failed to change the social fields in which abuse had occurred, limiting the success of individual professionals who worked intensively to support individual complainants, including a sexual health nurse (Case 5), a police officer (Case 4), and a teacher (Case 6). As a result, in the nine cases under consideration justice was largely achieved but safety was rarely realised.

The safeguarding implications of these findings are threefold and will be presented in this concluding chapter, along with a persistent query regarding young people's pursuit of safety. In total these concluding considerations will propose modifications to safeguarding practice, policy and research that would better accommodate the conceptualisation of peer-on-peer abuse offered by this thesis, and will be used to identify the next steps that I will take on this research endeavour.

## **17.2 Accommodating social field interplay**

The reflexive interplay between fields and agents in the nine cases demonstrates that the social contexts associated to peer-on-peer abuse are integral to its nature, questioning the sufficiency of individualised assessments/interventions and the way in which individual vulnerabilities are currently communicated and explored in policy and research.

Contextual influence is already recognised in responses to abuse *within* the home. If a young person were to be raped in their home, one would expect children's social care to:

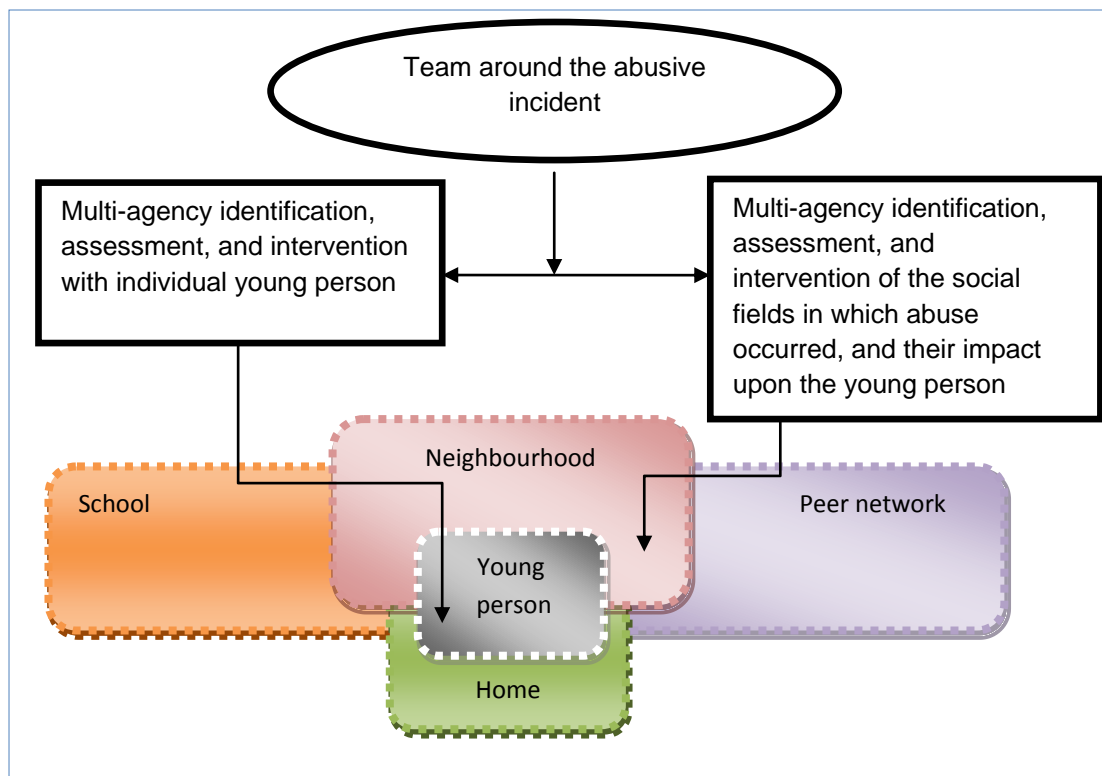
- remove the abusive person from the home environment
- assess the environment, including speaking to other young people in the home to ascertain if they had also been abused
- support the young person who had been raped while simultaneously working with the safe parent/carer/s to make that home safe again.

The young person would be removed from that environment as a last resort. It is difficult to conceive of a situation where a young person would receive individual support and assessment while being left in an abusive home, with the person who had raped them. It is equally inconceivable that professionals would remove the young person who had been raped from their home, leaving their siblings in the home and in the absence of any assessment on the home environment. And yet this is exactly what happened in response to other fields in the nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse under investigation.

In order to address the reflexive, multi-way, interplay between fields and agents, two fundamental adaptations are required to the responses documented in the nine cases. Firstly, assessments of individual young people would consider their behaviours with reference to the available choices within the social fields being navigated. Secondly, this approach to assessment would highlight the need for interventions levelled at multiple social fields beyond the individual in question as suggested by scholars in chapter two (Brodie, 2013; Hackett, 2014; Letourneau, et al., 2009; Melrose, 2013). Creating the change in social conditions that Bourdieu posited is required for the habitus to embody an alternative set of rules. Such an approach could be developed if, rather than listing individual vulnerabilities and contexts of concern independently of one another, scholars, policy-makers and practitioners gave greater account of the

reflexive impact that fields and individual characteristics/actions have on one another.

Rather than a team around the child, the cases required a team around the abusive incident. This approach would have supported the individual young person with reference to their reflexive interaction with social fields, while simultaneously engaging with the rules of the social fields themselves, as illustrated in Figure 12:



**Figure 12 A social fields response to an incident of peer-on-peer abuse**

Such an approach acknowledges the multiple contexts that may be associated to abusive incidents, and in some cases their differing weights of influence, enabling assessment and intervention to pay greater attention to the interplay between individual young people and the social contexts they navigate, both in sole and multiple-perpetrator offences. In applying the model in Figure 12 to a lead suspect, for example, Figure 13 depicts an approach to an abusive incident that involves the identification of



harm/resilience, assessment, and intervention in all of the fields associated to that case.

The ways in which fields interact with one another, and the young person in question, are addressed in this example, as is the multi-agency responsibility for changing the social norms within those spaces. Figure 13 is a composite case study drawing upon the themes identified across the nine files. It serves as an example of the ways in which identification, assessment and intervention would need to broaden to sufficiently respond to cases of peer-on-peer abuse.

In order to develop this hypothesis the current focus on familial and individual vulnerabilities within pre-existing literature needs to broaden to account for both the potential significance of the peer group, and other environments, to abusive incidents and the reflexive relationship between peer groups and familial/individual vulnerabilities already documented in research. Further work is required to test the proposed approach, including the identification of which agencies/ partnerships would oversee and deliver it. The influence of each field and interventions required are likely to differ on a case-by-case basis: i.e. peer group influence may differ in cases where a young person abuses alone compared to those where young people abuse as a group. At this stage, however, it more accurately reflects the response that was required to address the harm identified in the nine cases.

	Individual	Home	Peer Group	School	Neighbourhood
<b>Identify</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abusive behaviours</li> <li>Harmful attitudes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harmful gender norms</li> <li>Domestic abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Location of the abusive incident</li> <li>Involved followers and bystanders who endorsed the rape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hosted peer group</li> <li>Sexual harassment amongst students</li> <li>Ineffective professional responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physically abusive – the suspect has been physically assaulted in the neighbourhood for the past two years</li> </ul>
<b>Assess</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abusive behaviours (on the Hackett continuum)</li> <li>Relatively powerless in the home and local area</li> <li>Powerful in the peer group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hegemonic gender norms</li> <li>Exposes suspect to physical violence</li> <li>Suspect stays away from the house as a result</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embodies and reinforces norms from the home</li> <li>Embodies and reinforces norms from school</li> <li>Protects against harm in the local area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reinforces and fails to challenge harmful norms</li> <li>Exposes young people sexual abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A climate in which abusive networks form as a means of survival</li> </ul>
<b>Intervene</b>	<p>With the young person to address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>behaviour and attitudes</li> <li>impact of the home</li> <li>impact of, and on, the peer group</li> <li>impact of the school</li> <li>impact of abuse in the local area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the abusive parent to address domestic abuse</li> <li>With the abused parent to address the impact of domestic abuse on them and the suspect</li> </ul>	<p>With the peer network to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify positive bystanders</li> <li>Encourage pro-social attitudes</li> <li>Address the impact of the leader on the group</li> <li>Address the impact of the school and local area on group norms</li> </ul>	<p>With the school leadership, staff and students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address the culture of sexual harassment</li> <li>Create safety in bystander intervention</li> <li>Create positive social norms</li> </ul>	<p>With the neighbourhood to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address the risk of physical harm faced by local young people</li> <li>Create safety in bystander intervention</li> <li>Promote positive social norms</li> <li>Create routes to safety</li> </ul>

**Figure 13 Social field model of an individual assessment**

This sub-section has outlined the implications of a socio-cultural account of nine peer-on-peer abuse cases where reactive responses are required.

In order to prevent abusive incidents, and disrupt escalation, professionals would need to proactively engage with 'harmful' social fields – an implication considered in the following sub-section.

### **17.3 Prevention through social field intervention**

In addition to responding to abusive incidents, current safeguarding practice involves professionals intervening early to prevent abuse. Continuing with the metaphor drawn upon in the previous sub-section, when a home is identified as one in which a young person is 'at risk' of significant harm, social workers and other professionals work with the family to make the social field of the home safe, consequently preventing abuse. Professionals do not wait for abuse to occur before they intervene.

There is little evidence that such an approach was replicated in fields of concern in the nine cases under consideration. Should this have occurred, professionals would have responded to warning signs of escalation, such as harmful sexual behaviour or missing incidents, by assessing and working with/in the schools, neighbourhoods, and peer groups whose hegemonically masculine relations and abusive norms informed those individual behaviours. Instead individual warning signs were responded to, or ignored, abstracted from the gendered and age-specific social contexts in which they were occurring – by using interventions such as detentions for HSB or behaviour contracts in response to neighbourhood-based disorder. The interplay between fields and individual behaviours were not interrogated, and the harmful rules of fields remained intact.

Prevention of the abusive incidents in question required the creation of safe and pro-social norms in fields identified as 'harmful'. Working together professionals needed to assess local neighbourhoods, schools and peer groups ascertaining the extent to which the young people who interacted with them were at risk of significant harm. Arguably, as young people are dependent upon professionals to ensure that the spaces in which they develop are safe ones, there is a role for professionals to change social

fields assessed as being 'harmful', despite the fact that for the cases in question these fields were largely beyond the home.

Such an operational response would intervene with fields and their interaction with individual young people. This study has repeatedly recognised young people as social agents who make choices within fields in which they experience harm, largely independent of professional support. Rather than seeking to control young people, and their perceived 'risky behaviours', professionals may be better placed to create safe environments in which young people can in turn make safer choices. Should this occur it would create a means by which escalation could be disrupted. After all, it was not choices that were necessarily risky but the menu of choices within given fields that were particularly problematic for the young people in the case files.

Preventative interventions could create the conditions for social change in which the generative capacity of the habitus, as displayed by bystanders in the nine cases, could be effectively realised. This moves beyond practices that distance young people from 'harmful' peers or neighbourhoods through relocation and instead attempts to make those spaces safe. In the absence of such a change in conditions, bystander intervention is limited to unsafe fields which, in the nine cases, compromised young people's safety and/or resulted in them being relocated. It is this potential for social change through the re-shaping of social fields that will now be considered.

#### **17.4 Enabling alternative action, re-shaping social fields**

In the files, young people, parents and professionals sought to safeguard other young people from peer-on-peer abuse; however their attempts were limited by individualisation. Individual professionals tried to work with individual young people, and parents asked professionals for help in safeguarding those individuals in their care. In five of the nine cases individual young people challenged their individual peers while remaining

within their peer group. Meanwhile fields which hosted those individuals reinforced, or at least failed to challenge, the harmful norms which informed harmful behaviour. While examples of bystander intervention illustrated that the abusive incidents were far from determined, opportunities to alter the direction of events were compromised when the conditions for change were not created. As a result, some young people who challenged their peers' behaviour, but didn't change the social rules associated to it, were then at risk within the schools and neighbourhoods of which they were a part.

International literature on bystanders indicates that people are more likely to intervene and challenge abusive behaviours in contexts that support such a challenge (Fabiano and Perkins, 2003; Flood and Fergus, 2009; Tremlow and Fonagy, 2004). As a result, social policy and academics in countries including Australia and America have explored ways in which social environments such as schools and sports clubs can encourage and protect bystander action as a means of preventing sexual violence (Hawkins, 2005; Pease, 2008; Powell, 2011). Applying this approach in the case files would have required professionals to strategically and operationally intervene with social fields when preventing, and responding to, peer-on-peer abuse, as outlined in the two previous sub-sections. This could have created the 'social architecture' (Powell, 2011:25) in which young people, parents and professionals challenged hegemonically masculine gendered relations, and adopted/ reinforced safe social norms, without compromising personal safety. This could, in turn, reduce the perceived need to either use relocation or, for those who remain in fields, engage in forms of symbolic violence as a means of establishing gendered notions of status and safety by proxy.

The extent to which social conditions change also has a bearing upon both young people's capacity to freely give or refuse consent, and the culpability they hold for their behaviours. Building upon Pearce's (2013) social model of consent, my study has evidenced the difficulties in

abstracting young people's choices, and therefore agency, from the contexts in which they occur. In order to understand an individual's actions, due attention should be paid to the suite of (safe) choices that were available at a given time. This applies to those who are abused, who abuse others, or who witness abuse.

In terms of policy and practice, this finding adds weight to recent moves by the CPS to assess the credibility of an allegation of sexual assault as opposed to the credibility of the individual, conceptualising the actions of individuals with reference to the abusive incident itself. In order to progress this further all local agencies who respond to peer-on-peer abuse cases could consider adopting a similar method.

Beyond this however, social models of choice raise questions about the use of 'Joint Enterprise' to prosecute individuals who offend as part of a group. Interrogation of the peer group dynamic in the nine cases reviewed in this research evidenced that some suspects had greater power than others at the point of the offence. Furthermore, both hegemonically masculine social conditions and the actions of leaders set the parameters of (safe) choices in the abusive moment, and during the escalatory period. If no, or ineffective, attempts have been made to enable a young person to opt out of an abusive incident in a way that didn't compromise their safety then to what extent was that individual culpable? This doesn't negate agency – it simply contextualises actions to better account for motive and intent. Developing answers to such questions would be greatly assisted by further research into the difference between young people who sexually, physically and/or emotionally harm their peers alone, and those who do so within a group.

Paying attention to the social conditions in which abuse occurs, and interventions are delivered, also has implications for the way services are commissioned and evaluated. Investing in programmes that tell young people what a healthy relationship or friendship is, in the absence of impacting the fields in which such relationships can be fostered, may

result in young people knowing what to do but being unable to embody such rules and put them into practice. The role of professionals in schools and neighbourhoods, where young people form friendships, is critical to this endeavour. In terms of evaluation, it is pertinent to investigate whether a (lack of) change in the social conditions in which 1:1 interventions are employed impacts on their success. If the risks within fields associated to peer-on-peer abuse persist, then it is likely that interventions with associated individuals will have reduced success.

### **17.5 Exploring a pursuit of safety as a motor of human action**

In addition to identifying three key implications for safeguarding practice, policy and research, this study has raised fundamental questions about motivations for human action. Chapter three noted that, in critiquing Bourdieu's social theory, Dreyfus and Rabinow (1995), amongst others, questioned whether the pursuit of cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital, in order to achieve status within a field, is the universal motivation of human action. The findings of my study would reiterate this query, with reference to whether the pursuit of safety is also a motivating factor. While files evidence a pursuit of status with hegemonically masculine hierarchies amongst young people, and the reinforcement of such ideals within social fields, it is not clear whether status or safety was the end goal. This is not to say that these are mutually exclusive targets: young people may perceive safety as achieved through symbolic status. However, if they were already safe would all of the young people who do so engage in symbolic violence in the way that is recorded in the case files?

As literature explored in chapter three indicated, young people develop gendered identities through interplay with social fields. It may be that in addition to promoting harmful gender norms, some social fields such as the neighbourhood operated to hierarchical structures that promoted safety as achieved through a pursuit of hegemonic masculinity. If this conceptual train of thought was applied, practice interventions would

recognise that young people would need to feel safe to pursue/promote alternative masculinities and engage the generative capacity of the habitus. It would not be substantial for interventions to simply expose young men to alternative masculinities in order to change behaviours. Such interventions would need to be accompanied by a change in the social conditions in which they lived in order that it was safe for them to embody rules that were alternate to a pursuit of hegemonic masculinity.

This finding introduces a potential adaption to Bourdieusian thought while retaining the tenets of agency/field interplay. In order to develop my proposal, scholars could consider associations of safety and hegemonic masculinity when exploring motives for instances of peer-on-peer abuse – at present an area of research which requires far greater interrogation.

### **17.6 Conclusion: changing rules to foster alternative behaviours – a contextualised safeguarding framework for peer-on-peer abuse**

In applying a gendered and age-specific version of constructivist structuralism to nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse, my study has contributed to how the phenomenon is both conceptualised and addressed. It demonstrates the value of a contextualised understanding of abusive incidents and points to ways in which practice, policy and research could develop in order to better safeguard young people.

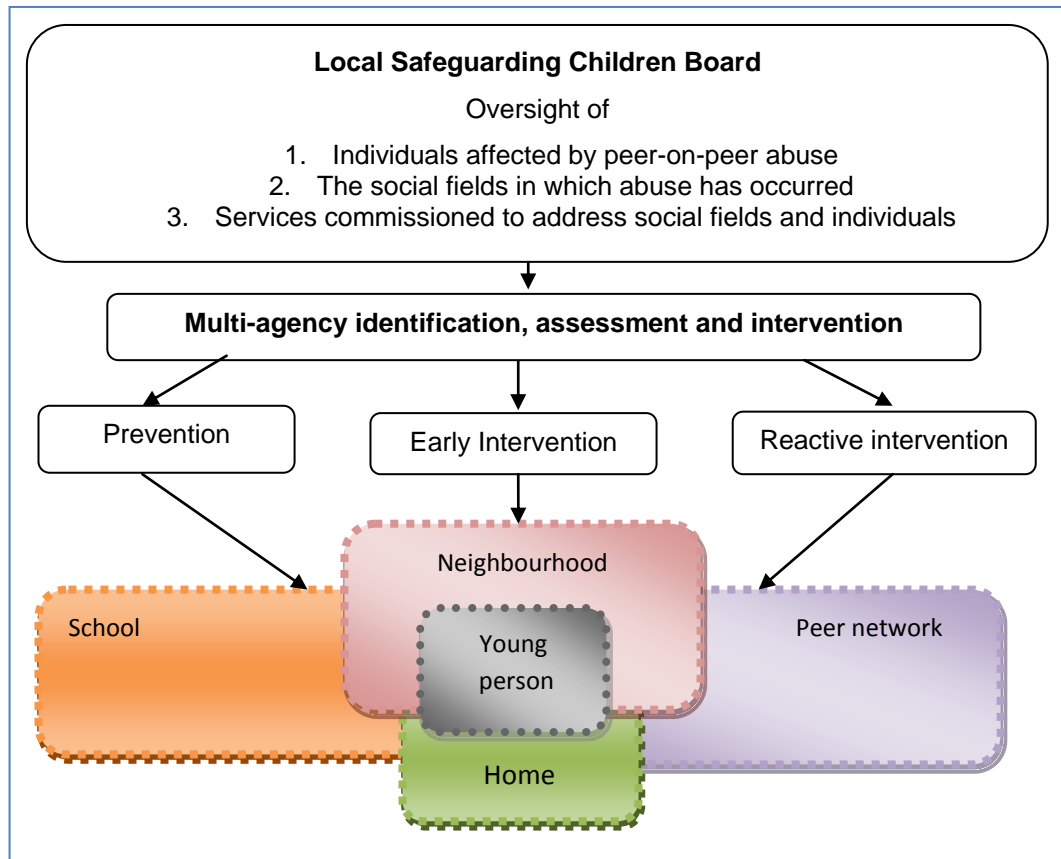
Building on both the emerging critique of individualised accounts of peer-on-peer abuse, and the ecological framework employed in multi-systemic therapy (Henggeler, et al., 2009; Letourneau and Borduin, 2008; Letourneau, et al., 2013), the findings of my study indicate that practice needs to shift from multi-agency working around an individual to multi-agency working around a case: addressing the risk and resilience across fields and individuals associated to an abusive incident. Such an approach could be facilitated through a ‘contextualised’ safeguarding framework. To elucidate: an approach to safeguarding that changes the harmful rules



within fields upon which young people are dependent for their development and safety. Such a method would enable young people (social agents) to develop a feel for 'safe' rules and 'non-hegemonic' relations embodied through their interactions with one another and reinforced across fields. Applying this theoretical approach creates opportunities for:

- the formation of gendered and age-specific interventions and assessments
- assessments and interventions which support the investigation process
- young people to be supported rather than controlled to make safe choices
- young people to realise safety within and external to their homes
- addressing abuse that extends beyond individual investigations.

Employing all of these components, Figure 14 depicts a 'contextualised' framework for safeguarding young people from peer-on-peer abuse.



**Figure 14 Contextualised safeguarding framework**

Adopting this framework extends the notion of multi-agency working. Rather than multiple agencies working around one individual, multiple agencies would be working to address a case through engagement with the fields and individuals to which it was connected. Therefore, rather than housing professionals trying to relocate a young person they may seek to involve youth workers and safer neighbourhood teams to make the housing, in which the young person already lives, safer. Likewise, rather than education professionals moving a complainant from a school in which they had been raped, professionals could work with the school leadership and student body to challenge harmful, gendered school cultures, thus improving the pre-existing school environment. In both cases, this would open up young people's space for alternative action, and enable them to employ agency to disengage from symbolic violence and make alternative choices.

For this methodological approach to be realised LSCBs may consider their strategic oversight of 'harmful' social environments within their geographical area of responsibility. In addition to receiving statistics on the numbers of peer-on-peer abuse cases that have occurred locally, and the characteristics of the young people involved, LSCBs could also request information on the fields to which these cases are associated. This data could inform the commissioning of both services to address 'harmful' fields, as well as services that work with individual young people who interact with those contexts.

This framework needs to be piloted, and such a pilot is beyond the parameters of my study. At this stage, it provides a visual illustration of the multi-agency safeguarding approach I propose. The 'contextualised' safeguarding framework recommends that multi-agency responses to peer-on-peer abuse include:

- a strategic vision that incorporates the interplay between fields and agency
- identification, assessment and intervention of social fields and individuals
- the creation of safe, and non-hegemonically masculine, spaces in which young people can make safe choices.

To further the value of this endeavour, applying this method of analysis to cases in other police services would be particularly useful. As a means of contributing to this I am currently working with 11 LSCBs across England to pilot the safeguarding model proposed in this chapter. I also continue to work directly with young women and young men who want to change the environments in which they form friendships and relationships.

In theory, changing social fields is a greater task than changing individual young people; yet my study has evidenced that they are not mutually exclusive. Evidence of positive bystanders challenges professionals to consider how they harness a desire amongst young people to disrupt

abuse. It must be possible to create the conditions in which safe choices can be made in a safe way – my study provides a template for further testing and exploration of this approach.

## Appendix A: Table of case file sources

**Table 30 Sources for Case 1**

Type	Length in pages
Case overview from CRIS in disclosure form	3
Police schedule of non-sensitive material	56
CRIS - details of investigation	107
Case Summary to assist charging decision	18
Previous convictions of suspect B1 ad B2	7
Case Summary to assist charging decision	33
Instructions to council	10
Suspect profiles B1 – B8	23
anonymity applications for witnesses	14
Notification of the use of 'hearsay' evidence	2
special measures application for witnesses	29
special measures application for G1	7
Diagrams drawn by G1 of the assault	21
Haven notes - from examination	26
MSN log of conversations B6, B9 and G1	72
CRIMINT B3 and B1	4
Acceptable Behaviour Contract B3 and B5	4
Record of Stop B4 x 2	4
CRIMINT involving B1, B3, B6 and two others	2
CRIMINT involving B5 and B8	2
Acceptable Behaviour Contract B8 and B2	4
Facial Mapping reports of B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7. B8	139
Statement of B1 and B5	5
ABE interview of G2	42
Local neighbourhood map and problem profile	3
<b>TOTAL PAGES</b>	<b>637</b>

**Table 31 Sources for Case 2**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Length in pages</b>
CRIS - details of investigation	117
Suspect profile B1	3
Suspect profile B2	2
Suspect profile B3	1
Neighbourhood problem profile	3
<b>TOTAL PAGES</b>	<b>126</b>

**Table 32 Sources for Case 3**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Length in pages</b>
CRIS - details of investigation (statements and drawings of venue)	164
Suspect profile G14	2
Suspect profile B6	2
Suspect profile G2	1
Suspect profile G3	1
School emails regarding B6 and G14	2
Facebook entry G14 mother	1
Complainant profile G1	1
Witness interviews G4, G5, G6, G7, G8, B2	32
Neighbourhood problem profile	3
<b>TOTAL PAGES</b>	<b>209</b>

**Table 33 Sources for Case 4**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Length in pages</b>
Closing report	11
Linked CRIS x 3	67
G1 record of interview	44
CAF on G1 - from VG school file	10
G1 school report - school file	8
G1 exclusion letter - school file	1
staff emails - school file	2
Youth Offending Team request for information form	2
Report to Behaviour Panel	5
Letters from NHS	5
A&E Log	8
Neighbourhood problem profile	3
Handwritten notes from G1	26
Suspect profiles B1 – B7 and B13	17

Complainant profile	2
Child protection minutes and link with youth offending service	8
CRIS - details of investigation	102
Email CPS decision	3
<b>TOTAL PAGES</b>	<b>194</b>

**Table 34 Sources for Case 5**

Type	Length in pages
CRIS - details of investigation	160
ID Papers Suspects B1 – B10	228
Witness Statement G2, G3, and G5	6
Guilty Plea Suspect B5	1
Disclosure to solicitors prior to interview	17
Pre-interview briefings to suspect IG to suspects x 2	2
Pre-interview briefing to suspect JB	1
Disclosure to solicitor prior to qu LW	3
Disclosure to solicitor prior to qu AJO	3
Pre-interview briefing to suspect JA	1
Pre-interview briefing to suspect SA	1
Pre-prepared statements for suspects	6
Sketch plan by witness re house	1
Sketch plan of bedroom, toilet and park G1	4
Handwritten note by G1	5
Handwritten letter from G1 to friend	3
Phone record for G1	1
Examination reports of assault locations	7
Production paperwork from custody B7	5
Warrants for searching premises of suspects	11
Premises search books for all suspects	76
Suspect Profiles B1 – B6	40
TIU result - on phones	4
TIU result - on phones explanation	5
MG6E report	4
MG6E report – content	5
Personal data request form - medical	4
Notes from sexual health worker	19
Notes from teacher (behaviour mentor) re G1 school	3
Notes from behaviour mentor and safeguarding lead school	2
Notes from intervention worker	2
Neighbourhood problem profile	3
	633

**Table 35 Sources for Case 6**

Type	Length in pages
CRIS - details of investigation	94
Linked CRIS x 2	43
G1 ABE record of interview	26
Emails between school staff re G1 behaviour	4
G1 school record	7
School record of B1	19
Letter from school to court	1
Youth Offending Team request for information form	2
G1 mother statement	3
Neighbourhood problem profile	3
Handwritten notes from G1	26
Suspect profiles B1	4
Complainant profile	1
<b>TOTAL PAGES</b>	<b>233</b>

**Table 36 Sources for Case 7**

Type	Length in pages
Prosecution opening statement	51
Prosecution opening statement for G1 only	51
Suspect profile G1	4
Suspect profiles B1 - B17 and their homes	26
CCTV footage of incident day before	N/A
CCTV footage of the day	N/A
Pre-sentence report G1	10
Merlin reports on home of G1 x 2	3
Investigation report	147
Facebook conversations via a power point slide	12
Neighbourhood profile	2
<b>TOTAL PAGES</b>	<b>304</b>

**Table 37 Sources for Case 8**

Type	Length in pages
MG5 – included all witness statements and investigation overview	77
Suspect profiles B1, B4 and B5	7
Peer network profiles G3 – G8	12
School profile – calls following the offence	3
Neighbourhood profile	2
<b>TOTAL PAGES</b>	<b>101</b>



**Table 38 Sources for Case 9**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Length in pages</b>
opening statement - prosecution	83
subject profile SG1	6
phone statement analysis	3
statement analysis B1, G1, B3, B4, B5	12
call report between B1 and B2	2
map of scene	1
sequence of events - timeline map	4
map of B2 associates	4
suspect profiles B2,B3, B4, B5, B6	53
Merlin report G1 missing	4
Merlin report G1 missing	4
suspect profile for older brother of B5 and B6	8
Statements G2 and G3	4
statement for G3 and G4	10
Foyer website for B6 accommodation	1
Merlin reports linked to B3	2
Merlin reports linked to P2	17
Neighbourhood profile	1
Investigation report	74
<b>TOTAL PAGES</b>	<b>305</b>

## Appendix B: Terminology applied to cases of peer-on-peer abuse

### Sexual Exploitation

The definition of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) used in Government safeguarding guidance, and drawn upon from most academic texts since 2009 is as follows:

Sexual exploitation of children and young people **under 18** involves exploitative **situations, contexts and relationships** where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, **sexual activities**. .... In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have **power over them** by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being **characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice** resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.

(DCSF 2009:9) [Bold added by author]

### Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Research into harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) is concerned with the study of 'children and young people presenting with sexual behaviours that are outside of developmentally 'normative' parameters' (Hackett 2014:15).

### Serious Youth Violence

Described as 'any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime, where the victim is aged 1-19' (London Safeguarding Children

Board, 2009), the definition of serious youth violence policy, like HSB, is age and behaviour specific. Yet it is limited by the lack of consideration it gives to relational dynamics of an abusive incident, conceptualising violent behaviours in the absence of social context.

### **Teenage Relationship Abuse**

‘Emotional, verbal, physical and sexual forms of violence...both in isolation and as they coexist in young people’s relationships<sup>40</sup>’ (Barter, et al., 2009:12);

### **Multiple Perpetrator Rape**

MPR is termed as ‘any sexual assault involving two or more perpetrators’ (Horvath and Kelly, 2009:94)

### **Gang**

Policy and research recognise that serious youth violence occurs both within, and external to, street gangs. A gang is defined as:

relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with, or lay claim over, territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and (5) are in conflict with other similar gangs

(Centre for Social Justice 2009, Pitts 2008).

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<sup>40</sup> While adopting a fluid definition of relationships, researchers still restrict these instances to that which happens between ‘partners’ i.e. 1:1 and which therefore does not include peer groups

## Appendix C- Additional tables

**Table 39 Frequency and percentage complainant age by gender crosstabulation**

		Gender				Total
		Male		Female		
		n	%	n	%	
Age	11	0	0	2	22.2	2
	12	0	0	0	0	0
	13	0	0	2	22.2	2
	14	0	0	2	22.2	2
	15	1	11.1	1	11.1	2
	16	1	11.1	0	0	1
Total		2	22.2	7	77.8	9

**Table 40 Frequency and percentage suspect age by gender crosstabulation**

		Gender				Total
		Male		Female		
		n	%	n	%	
Age	13	10	13.2	0	0	10
	14	18	23.7	3	3.9	21
	15	8	10.5	1	1.3	9
	16	15	19.7	0	0	15
	17	12	15.8	1	1.3	13
	18	0	0	1	1.3	1
	Unknown	7	9.2	0	0	7
Total		70	92.1	6	7.9	76

**Table 41 Frequency and percentage age of witnesses**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
11	3	6.7
12	4	8.9
13	4	8.9
14	8	17.8
15	11	24.4
16	2	4.4
18+	1	2.2
Total	33	73.3
Missing data	12	26.7

**Table 42 Frequency and percentage recorded ethnicity of witnesses**

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Asian	6	13.3
Black British	13	28.9
African Caribbean	2	4.4
Turkish	3	6.7
White British	2	4.4
Total	26	57.8
Missing	19	42.2
Total	45	100.0

**Table 43 Frequency of suspect missing incidents by case**

		Number of suspects recorded as missing		Total
		Once	Three +	
Case ID	1	1	5	6
	2	0	2	2
	3	0	2	2
	4	0	6	6
	5	2	1	1
	6	0	1	1
	7	0	3	3
	8	0	2	2
	9	0	6	6

**Table 44 Length of suspect missing episodes**

Length of missing	Frequency	Percentage of all suspects	Percentage of missing where length is recorded
2-6 hours	2	2.6	6.7
up to 12 hours	4	5.3	13.3
overnight	3	3.9	10.0
24 hours	3	3.9	10.0
<b>up to 5 days</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>40.0</b>
<b>over 5 days</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>20.0</b>
Total	30	39.5	100.0
missing not recorded	45	59.2	
length not recorded	1	1.3	
Total	46	60.5	

**Table 45 Frequency and percentage recorded previous offences by suspects**

Offence type	Frequency of young people	Percentage of young people
violence against person	14	18.4
robbery	4	5.3
other	6	7.9
sexual+violence against person	2	2.6
sexual+robbery	1	1.3
violence against person+robbery	7	9.2
robbery+drugs	1	1.3
robbery+other	1	1.3
sexual+ violence against person +robbery	4	5.3
sexual+robbery+drugs	1	1.3
robbery+violence against person+drugs	2	2.6
sexual+robbery+drugs+violence against person	1	1.3
robbery+violence against person +other	5	6.6
unknown	7	9.2
no evidence of offending prior to the offence	20	26.3
Total	76	100.0

**Table 46 Frequency and percentage child protection concerns recorded for young people across all files**

Form of abuse	Frequency	Percentage
Neglect	12	26.1
Sexual	1	2.2
Physical	3	6.5
Emotional	1	2.2
Neglect+physical	2	4.3
Physical+emotional	5	10.9
Neglect+physical+emotional	1	2.2
Sexual+neglect+emotional+physical	1	2.2

**Table 47 young men as identified in the investigation cross-tabulated with nature of harm in their relationships**

			YP harmed or harmer		Total
			harmed	harmer	
Identified.as	complainant	Count	1	0	1
		% within Identified.as	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within YP harmed or harmer	50.0%	0.0%	5.3%
		% of Total	5.3%	0.0%	5.3%
	suspect	Count	1	12	13
		% within Identified.as	7.7%	92.3%	100.0%
		% within YP harmed or harmer	50.0%	70.6%	68.4%
		% of Total	5.3%	63.2%	68.4%
	witness	Count	0	1	1
		% within Identified.as	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within YP harmed or harmer	0.0%	5.9%	5.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	5.3%	5.3%
	other	Count	0	4	4
		% within Identified.as	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within YP harmed or harmer	0.0%	23.5%	21.1%
		% of Total	0.0%	21.1%	21.1%
Total		Count	2	17	19
		% within Identified.as	10.5%	89.5%	100.0%
		% within YP harmed or harmer	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	10.5%	89.5%	100.0%



**Table 48 Frequency and percentage of suspect offences following investigation**

<b>Nature of Offending</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
violence against person	5	20.0
robbery	5	20.0
drugs	2	8.0
Oother	2	8.0
violence against person+robbery	1	4.0
violence against person +drugs	2	8.0
robbery+other	1	4.0
sexual+violence against person +robbery	1	4.0
robbery+violence against person+drugs	4	16.0
sexual+robbery+drugs+ violence against person	2	8.0
Total	25	100.0

## **Appendix D: Case File Data Collection Template**

**CODE NAME**  
**SITE CODE**

**Template for collection of case study material**

Section A: The Offence

Section 2: The Young People and the Social Fields

Section 3: Response by professionals

## **Section 1: The Offence/Case**

### **1.1     *Details presented:***

**Unique reference:**

**Type of Case** (CSE, DV, SYV)

### **1.2     *Case Overview***

**Please provide a synopsis of the case:**

Time:

Date:

Individuals age/gender

Case outline

### **1.3     *The nature of the violence involved in the case:***

**What do the case notes tell us about the forms of violence used?**

<b>Violence</b>	
Physical	
Emotional	
Sexual	
Financial	
Cyber	
Weapons Used?	

Details:

**Is the offence a 'one-off' incident or did it take place over more than 24 hours?**

**Were any particular control tactics, such as videoing, threats, grooming evident in the case notes?**

**What is known about the motive for the offence?**

**Roles played by young people during the offence**

## **Section 2: The young people and their social fields**

### **2.1 The individual young people**

	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	GA ind	GA fam	GA peers	GA school	GA neigh

**For each young person involved in the case, do the case notes indicate whether they were known to any of the following services/sectors:**

Children's Services								
Police								
Youth Offending								
School								
Pupil Referral Unit								
Sexual health								
CAMHS								
Housing								
VCS other								

**Why did these services have a relationship with the young people in the case?**

**Of the young people involved in the case were any known to go missing of own accord or abducted?**

**Was the referral after a period of going missing from the initial place of safety?**

**Did the young person return to the place of safety after a period of going missing? Why?**

**What did they say about the intervening period?**

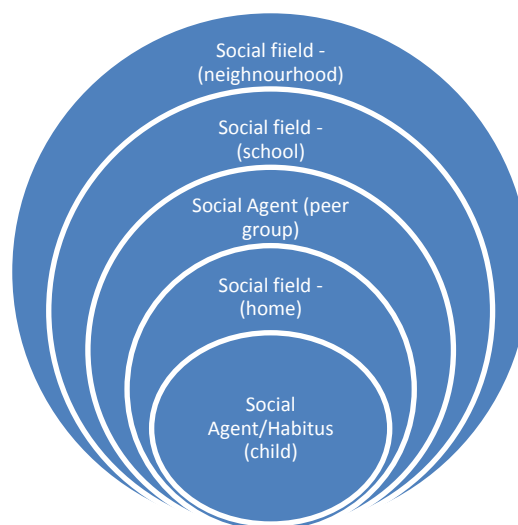
**What were the living arrangements of the young people involved in the case?**

Living with parents									
Other relative									
Homeless									
Residential unit – open									
Residential unit - secure									
Private fostering									
Local authority fostering									
Bed & Breakfast									
Semi-independent living									
YOIs									
Other									

**Sequential account of accommodation:**

**Reasons for leaving accommodation:**

## 2.2 Young People's Social Fields



**Overview of the individual young people: what is recorded about their individual behaviours and characteristics?**

**In terms of:**

- a) abusive behaviours in relation to the categories used in section A**
  - b) criminality**
  - c) gendered norms**
  - d) protective and supportive behaviours**
- 
- What is recorded about the homes/families from which the young people have come from and where they were living at the time of the incident?
  - What is recorded about the peer groups to which the young people are associated?
  - What is recorded about any intimate relationships in which the individual young people in the case were involved?
  - What is recorded about the schools attended by the young people in the case file?
  - What is recorded about the neighbourhood from where the young people were from/lived at the time of the incident?

### **Section 3: Service Response**

#### **3.1 Identification**

Who first identified the offence:

<b>Agency</b>	
Police	
Mental health professional	
Sexual health professional	
Physical health professional	
A&E	
Children's services	
Social worker	
School	
Parent	
Residential worker	
Foster carer	
Other young person	
Community organisation	
Faith group	
YOT	
Other - peer	
Police	

**Was the offence identified following a disclosure/complaint or by some other means/behaviour (explain)?**

**Outline the initial response of agencies and the process by which it came to police attention and recorded?**

Stress on **qualitative account** of the circumstances around identification  
(including: what indicated there had been an offence? what evidence was noted?  
what were the 'warning signs?')

#### **3.2 Referral and Assessment**

Where did the person who identified the young people in the case refer them to? Who else was notified?

<b>Agency</b>	
BIA / Immigration	
Children's services	

Police	
A&E	
NSPCC Helpline	
Other voluntary agencies	
Solicitors	
Mental health assessment	
Sexual health assessment	
Physical health assessment	
Educational assessment	
School	
Parent	
Social worker	
Residential worker	
Foster carer	
Other young person	
Community organisation	
Faith group	
YOT	
Other	

Were any particular assessment conducted on the young people prior to or following the identification of the offence (AIM, CAF, DASH, CSE Assessment, Gang Matrix, etc.)

### 3.3 Multi-agency working

Which multi-agency structure, if any, had oversight of the case and the young people involved:

MARAC	
CSE sub-group of LSCB	
MASH	
Child Protection Conference	
MAPPA	
Multi-agency gangs groups	
Police Gold Group	

Comments:

### 3.4: Investigation process



**Following the initial report of the offence which part/branch/unit of the police force led the investigation (Child Abuse, Sexual Offences, Domestic Abuse, Public Protection, CID etc.)?**

**How long did the investigation process take (including up until charge, and between charge and prosecution)?**

**Were other agencies (outside of the police) involved in the investigation? Did any provide evidence for example?**

**Who was interviewed as part of the investigation?**

**What other forms of evidence were collected and used in the case (phone records, forensics, CCTV footage etc)?**

**Did any of the offenders offer a guilty plea (explain)?**

**Did the investigation identify leaders/followers within the group offenders?**

**Were all suspects charged (explain)?**

**Were all suspected victims formal complainants (explain)?**

**What was the complainants account of the offence (explain)?**

**What was the suspects account of the offence (explain)?**

**Were any suspects considered to have been coerced into offending during the investigation process (explain)?**

**Where any of the complainants also offenders, and if so how was this managed (explain)?**

**What were the CPS views on the case (if available)?**

### 3.5 Services

#### What services were provided prior to the investigation?

Service									
Children's Social Care									
Witness Protection									
Health - physical									
Health – sexual									
Health – mental/emotional									
Education									
Youth Offending									
Housing / accommodation									
Rape Crisis									
SARC									
Recreational / social activities									
Legal									
DV									
CSE									
Other									

#### What services were provided during the investigation?

Service									
Children's Social Care									
Witness Protection									
Health - physical									
Health – sexual									
Health – mental/emotional									
Education									
Youth Offending									

Housing / accommodation									
Rape Crisis									
SARC									
Recreational / social activities									
Legal									
DV									
CSE									
Other									

What services were provided following the investigation?

<b>Service</b>									
Children's Social Care									
Witness Protection									
Health - physical									
Health – sexual									
Health – mental/emotional									
Education									
Youth Offending									
Housing / accommodation									
Rape Crisis									
SARC									
Recreational / social activities									
Legal									
DV									
CSE									
Other									

**Was work undertaken with the family, peer group, school or neighbourhood following charging?**

**What needs beyond those related to the case had to be met in relation to all of the young people involved?**

**Were any additional services (specifically related to the offence) provided to the young people in custody?**

### **3.6 Outcomes:**

**Were any young people convicted as a result of the investigation?**

**Were any young people placed on safeguarding or child protection arrangements as a result of the investigation?**

**Were any children moved or relocated as a result of the investigation?**

**Were any children secured in custody as a result of the investigation or trial?**

**Did any children require ongoing mental or sexual health support following the investigation?**

**Was there any loss of life or further instances of harm to the young people involved in the case following the investigation?**

**Was a review of the case undertaken, what type and by whom (DHR, SCR etc.)?**

**Have there been any changes to local practice, strategic planning or service commissioning following the case?**

**Other relevant details of case not covered by the above questions?**



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